



Unfinished Tales
from a Russian Prison

Marguerite E. Harrison

By the Same Author

MAROONED IN MOSCOW

Unfinished Tales from a Russian Prison

By
Marguerite E. Harrison

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UNFINISHED TALES FROM A RUSSIAN PRISON. I

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I

The Setting

DULL lead-coloured light filtered through dirty panes of whitewashed glass into a long, narrow, high ceilinged coffin-shaped room. It cast an unbecoming reflection on the faces of nine women lying on as many plank beds, one of which I had occupied myself for nearly seven months. The beds were lined up on either side of the room, starting at the small end, where there was but a narrow gangway between them, and widening out towards the other end, where one bed was placed beneath the hermetically sealed window. Two more filled up the widest part of the floor space, still further encumbered by a long deal table.

The atmosphere had the same tangible quality as the furnishings. It was a concrete

thing, composed of smells. In a corner hung a lineful of half washed clothes—on one of the side walls was a row of hooks holding velvet and fur wraps, a filthy sheepskin coat, and a peasant shawl. On the table was a miscellaneous assortment of dirty cups and plates left over from the previous evening.

It was not a pretty scene, and as I surveyed it in the hard morning light, I could not help reflecting that the nine of us, all political prisoners in the Moscow prison of the Checka, were just as ill assorted as our belongings. On the bed at the wide end of the room a peasant woman was sitting in a grimy unbleached chemise, nibbling sunflower seeds. Her next door neighbour was still sleeping, her head buried in two huge lace trimmed pillows, her blue silk quilt pulled up over her ears, and she had captured our only chair on which to put her clothes. From under her bed protruded a Morocco dressing bag, half open, showing its silver fittings. Across the way, a young girl was putting on a rough homespun skirt which had served her as a blanket during the night. She was tall and dark, with aquiline features and a strong capable face.

“Get up, Maria Petrovna,” she called to a middle aged woman at the other end of the room, who was sitting up in bed, comb-

ing her hair with a side comb, "we are dezhyurnyi, on duty, this morning."

"Gospodi," returned the older woman, "I feel as if I'd been up all night. Tanya talks in her sleep, and she kept me awake for hours." She rose languidly and began to dress.

In a few minutes the key was turned in the door, and a hand holding a broom was thrust in. The broom had seen better days. In its present state it was a pole, to the end of which adhered a mass of stubble. With this inadequate instrument, the tall girl swept underneath the beds, pushing aside baskets, boxes, knapsacks, valises, and a miscellaneous collection of shoes. Under one, on which a rather pretty woman with traces of makeup still on her face was lying, she picked up a switch of false hair.

She wore straw slippers, which gave her a curious shuffling motion. Occasionally one of them dropped off, and she slipped her foot in again, with a muttered exclamation. Cigarette stubs, scraps of paper, rags, dead matches and rolls of dust were swept into a heap near the door, after which the hand appeared again, whisking broom and debris into the hall.

Soon the door opened once more; this time to show a sour visaged woman in a big linen

apron standing with her arms full of thick slices of black bread.

"Skolko chelovyek, how many?" she asked.

"Nine," answered Maria Petrovna, taking the bread, which she dumped in a heap on the dirty table.

"Portions smaller than ever to-day," she remarked.

Meanwhile the rest of us were getting up. A blonde girl with a baby face sat up in bed, and reached under the wooden headrest which served her as a pillow, pulling out a pack of cards made from the long paper mouth pieces of Russian cigarettes.

"Godanya," she announced, cheerfully. So saying she dealt the cards into nine piles face down, naming them as she did so, then picked them up one by one. For one woman there was good news, for another an illness, and so on till she came to her own pile. She looked at it, shrugged her shoulders and laughed. "Smert—death," she said shortly. "Vsyo rovno—who cares?"

The key grated in the lock, and she hastily thrust the cards under her pillow just in time to escape the eye of a tall man in a khaki blouse and high boots, wearing an astrakhan cap, and carrying a large copper tea kettle. At this there was a general scramble for

empty bottles, teapots, cups and earthenware bowls.

The man grinned. "Tea by the cup only," he ordered, "water heater's busted this morning."

There was a universal groan of dismay, as tea was used for laundry and bathing purposes, there being no other way to get hot water. The cups were filled under the stern eye of the Ganymede, who, however, allowed himself to be prevailed on by various blandishments to consent to the filling of two empty bottles. Then we all proceeded to munch black bread and drink the apple paring tea. In the midst of breakfast a soldier appeared at the door.

"Na oubornaya, to the washroom," he said solemnly.

There was nothing for it but to leave our tea to get cold, and we all filed out to the washroom, preceded by the dezhyurnyi, carrying the parashka, the tin refuse can, which stood in a corner of the room; those who had them with towels flung over one shoulder, soap and tooth-brushes in their hands. In the washroom we took turns two at a time washing in a big tin trough with ice cold water.

One woman stood on guard at the peephole in the door where the guard often looked

in to see what was going on, while several others scanned the walls for messages from relatives or fellow party members.

There was a suppressed exclamation of delight from an Anarchist. "X, B, forty-seven, too," she read. "Vassili got out yesterday!"

A Left Social Revolutionary spied an equally cryptic inscription, written on the wall with a sharp instrument, and almost invisible. "The hunger strike in all prisons starts to-morrow. S. R.'s take note."

Meanwhile Maria Petrovna, after emptying and cleaning the parashka, deposited in a crack in the wall a tiny note written on cigarette paper to a Comrade in another room, tucking into the bosom of her dress a similar note she had found in the same receptacle.

These activities were interrupted by a knock on the door. "Are you going to stay in there all day?" demanded a hoarse voice.

Thereupon the necessary ablutions were hastily completed and we marched back to the stifling room, where the dezhyurnyi washed dishes, and the rest settled themselves to various occupations. The peasant woman said her prayers, two Mensheviks talked in low tones about party matters, another pair fell into an animated discussion of the relative merits of the Proletarian and

Futurist poets, and the fortune teller laid out the cards again.

Once during the morning there was an interruption when the Commandant came in and called the roll—then quiet reigned till dinner time.

The dezhyurnyi took in and distributed nine bowls of herring soup. Several women undid handkerchiefs or dived in bags under their beds, producing delicacies sent them from home, and sharing them with their less fortunate companions. The soup was the colour of dirty dishwater. In it floated a few bits of backbone and tails, and some unpared frozen potatoes. Several of the bowls were untouched, but the peasant woman ate what was left, ravenously. Soup was followed by Kasha, a mush made of boiled millet.

After the dezhyurnyi had handed back the empty bowls and wiped the table with an old shirt sleeve, most of the women threw themselves on their beds. Some slept, some gazed into vacancy; the peasant woman knelt on her pallet with her face against the wall repeating her interminable prayers. The Left Social Revolutionary was confiding her troubles to an Anarchist—"and then I knew the game was up," she concluded. For a while there was silence.

It was broken by the entrance of a soldier with a slip of paper.

"Metschnikova," he demanded.

"Here," said Maria Petrovna.

"Sobiraite veschiami, pack your clothes," he commanded curtly.

For a moment Maria Petrovna stood as if glued to the spot. The summons was utterly unexpected, but there was no use asking questions and she began mechanically to collect her belongings in her blanket. Everybody helped, one handing over a spoon, another a pair of stockings, a third a piece of broken mirror, while the watchful eye of the guard never left Maria Petrovna for an instant. If any one spoke in an undertone, he ordered, "No talking."

Nevertheless she was the recipient of many messages conveyed by a sign or a whispered word for comrades "na volio," outside, in the event of her release. After she had gone every one speculated on her chances. Perhaps she had been freed, perhaps summoned for trial, perhaps taken to another prison, but in any event Maria Petrovna had passed out of the lives of most of us forever.

The afternoon dragged on, followed by supper—herring soup again. The light from the windows faded to dull lead once more, the electric lamp was turned on and cards

and gossip occupied the remainder of the evening. At eight the dreary procession to the wash-room was repeated, and at ten the lights were put out. Shortly afterwards a woman was seized by a violent attack of hysterical sobbing, and it was two hours before she dozed off to a troubled sleep.

Finally peace settled on the room, only to be broken by mysterious tappings on the steam pipes in the prison Morse. The men in the next room wanted to know who was ill, a man upstairs sent word that Tanya's husband had been arrested, a girl on the left inquired "If Sonya Lapinskaya was there?" Prisons are never quiet; there is never an hour of the day or night when the deceptive stillness is not vibrating with every variety of human emotions.

During the night the electric light was switched on several times by the guards, who peeped through the glazok to see that we were not up to any tricks. Most of the prisoners slept on unconcernedly, but the recent arrivals started nervously every time the room was flooded with light. Once one sprang from her bed crying out "God of Mercy—they've come."

Towards morning a new prisoner was admitted—a defiant Anarchist, who spent the

remainder of the night knocking on the door and demanding a straw pallet.

Another day was over in the Checka. I checked it off on my calendar—May 18, 1921. It was my two hundredth day. How many more would there be just like it, I wondered, and yet, on second thoughts, were they so much alike after all? I had met hundreds of women of all types and classes, and had learned to know them in prison as I could have nowhere else. Each had her story, and I had heard most of them, whispered or told outright during the long days and longer nights in the Checka. Every one was different, and each was a human document taken from real life.

I have retold a few of them in the following pages, but the reader who looks at the end first will be disappointed—they are nearly all unfinished stories. Sometimes I could guess the ending already written by the Moving Finger in the Book of Fate, but I was never able to read it. The last page was always torn out by a man in khaki with an astrakhan cap, who finished the torn page with a laconic “pack your clothes.”

II

Halka

AI—ye!" It was a long drawn scream from one of the women, whose nerves were not of the best.

"Tische!—silence," shouted the guard.

The others gasped, while every one stood in amazement, gazing at the apparition in the middle of the room. While the inmates of Number 23 were in the washroom a new prisoner had been brought in, and they had returned to be unexpectedly confronted with a figure so absolutely fantastic as to suggest nightmare rather than sober living reality.

The newcomer, apparently a boy about sixteen years old, stood leaning against the table, both hands in his pockets. He was of medium height, slightly built, and so thin that the skin drawn over his pallid cheek bones looked as if it must hurt. A big smudge of dirt decorated his chin. His cap was pulled down far over his sunken greenish grey eyes, still further concealed by a shock of light brown hair. He wore black

leather boots, from one of which two grimy toes protruded, filthy khaki breeches, and a torn sheepskin coat with nearly all the fur worn off.

"Chom dyel—what's the row?" he asked calmly.

"Bozhe sokhroni—God save us," exclaimed Tanya faintly, "I thought you were a man."

"No such luck," answered the girl, for at a second glance we could see that she was really a girl in boy's clothes. "If I had been, your cursed Bolsheviks wouldn't have got me."

While she spoke Russian perfectly, there was something about her accent that betrayed the foreigner.

"Where did you come from?" asked another woman.

"From Kiev," was the answer.

"Why were you arrested?"—the usual question.

"I'm a Polish spy," was the proud response.

"A spy? Slava Bog, you're nothing but a child. How old are you anyway?"

"Sixteen."

"What's your name?"

"Halka, I——" With that the small figure crumpled and fainted dead away.

When she had been revived, Halka sat up in bed and vigorously demanded her cap back again. She felt better with it on, she said. She looked around her coolly and impudently, munching a piece of "vobla," dried fish, given her by one of the other prisoners.

"Chudnaya obstanovka—swell joint here," she remarked. "Better than the prison at Kiev. I have slept on the floor there for a month. By the way, I don't think any of you had better come near me till I've had a bath."

Halka was perfectly right; from head to foot she was literally alive with vermin, but her pitiable condition and her evident weakness had not deprived her of her proficiency in the use of Russian Billingsgate. She spoke roughly, and cursed proficiently, yet it was easy to see that she belonged to a better class than the one with which she had identified herself. Her hands were long, slender and tapering at the finger tips; she had clean-cut, aristocratic features, and a well modulated voice. Her coarseness was a sort of transparent veneer, just as incongruous to her personality as the grotesque clothes, to which she clung tenaciously.

When her condition had been reported to the prison physician, and she had been taken, as a sanitary precaution, to the bath, her

clothes disinfected and her head shaved, she looked more human. Good food restored her spirits, and she took an almost childish delight in telling us all about her extraordinary career, for she had had, in spite of her sixteen years, adventures such as seldom fall to the lot of most men, even in revolutionary times.

She was born in a town in Russian Poland, where her father, a Captain in the Imperial Army, was Commander of the garrison. She was one of two children, both girls, but she had always hated dolls and all sorts of little girl plays. Almost from babyhood she had been her father's boon companion, and by the time she was ten years old, at the outbreak of the Great War, he had taught her how to shoot and ride a horse. Her father had been ordered to the front with his regiment, and during the early days of the war they only heard from him at rare intervals. Halka was always longing to go to him. She thought of nothing else.

Finally, after the peace of Brest Litovsk, when the German offensive in Eastern Poland was over, and the loyal Polish Legion began to form in Eastern Galicia to strike a blow under Pilsudski for a free Poland, Halka could stand it no longer. Against her mother's wishes, she joined the secret

organisation, the "P.O.V.," which furnished information to Pilsudski's men, and was clandestinely arming and organising the peasants. As she was so young, she was never suspected, and she managed to convey messages in cipher and transmit information under the very noses of the Germans.

Then came the Armistice, and the proclamation of the freedom of Poland. Halka was one of a band of townspeople who helped to disarm the demoralised Germans and send them packing home. Soon her father came back for a visit, for the first time in two years, and when he left again for the front, Halka followed him and turned up at his headquarters. She had run away from home dressed as a boy. Her father, who was very proud of his girl-boy, as he always called her, kept her with him, and then one day, in an attack on the Bolsheviks near Tarnopol, he was killed.

Halka wasted no time in tears. She refused all offers from the other officers to send her home, and going straight to the headquarters of the *Contrazvyetka*, the Polish Intelligence Service, she offered her services as a spy.

At that time, the Polish Army was advancing on Kiev, and Halka was very useful. Dressed as a peasant boy, she slipped in and

out between the lines bringing back valuable military information. The men in the regiment to which she was attached adored her. They called her "little brother," taught her to swear and drink with them and initiated her into the free masonry of army life.

Halka was with them when they entered Kiev in triumph after the rout of the Red Army. But the victory of the Poles was shortlived. The Bolsheviks concentrated their forces for another desperate drive. The Poles had outstripped their supply trains. They were not in a position to hold the city, and preparations for evacuation were begun.

At this juncture Halka was called one day to the office of the Chief. "How much do you love Poland, Halka?" he asked.

"Better than all the world," she answered.

"Would you be willing to remain behind in Kiev and furnish us with information?"

Halka promptly consented. She took off the Polish uniform of which she was so proud, and put on a Russian blouse and astrakhan cap. Soon after the Bolsheviks had retaken Kiev, a precocious, sharp featured boy turned up at the office of the Checka, told a plausible story of his parents having been murdered by the Poles, and asked to be employed as an informer against the disloyal Polish population. "He" was

taken on as an employé. Soon afterwards important documents were frequently lost in an inexplicable manner from the office, persons who had been informed against were secretly warned and made a getaway before they could be arrested, but it was some time before the leak was traced to Halka. Then she was arrested, put in the Kiev prison where she spent three months, and finally, on account of her extreme youth, she was sent to Moscow for trial and commitment to a reformatory institution.

She refused point-blank to go to cross-examination until her boy's clothes had been restored to her, then swaggered off to confront her judges with her hands in her pockets as usual, her cap at a jaunty angle on one side of her head. When she came back there was an odd smile on her small face.

"They've got me," she remarked, "but I informed on several of their own people who were playing them dirty tricks. A few Bolsheviks less in the world."

There was something intensely repellent about her utter hardness, and her lack of any womanly feeling, and yet, at the same time, underneath it all there was something essentially fine—the white flame of an ardent patriotism. No one liked Halka, yet she compelled a certain unwilling admiration.

Therefore it was a great surprise to us when, one day, she came back from her third cross-examination in a less defiant mood. She did not hum the Polish hymn as she usually did on these occasions.

"I talked with a nice man to-day," she remarked casually. "He told me that the Bolsheviks are not fighting the Polish people, but the Polish Pans, the aristocrats. There will soon be a Revolution in Poland; then I can go back there. He wants me to work for Poland here—for the Polish proletariat. When there is a world revolution we will all be brothers; every one will have everything he needs, and nobody will have to work but a few hours a day. Here's a book he gave me," and she displayed a primer of Karl Marx, which she read industriously the whole afternoon.

The next morning she turned to a Communist.

"Teach me the 'International,' " she demanded.

In a few minutes she was singing, in her thin, passionate little cracked voice,

"Come, Comrades, Eto yest nash pos-
now rally, lednye
"The last fight we I reshitelnye boi.
face

"The International S Internationalom
"Redeems the hu- Vozpranet rod ly-
man race. ouskskoi."

It was a startling transformation. Halka an embryo Communist! But the process went on. Halka was frequently called, now, not to cross-examination, but to conferences with officers of the Checka. Soon she announced that she was going to be released to join the secret police of the Bolsheviks.

While most of the women in the room were no friends of Poland, Halka's sudden change of front was a distinct shock. She was ostracised by everybody except our Communist, and we certainly believed in the sincerity of her conversion.

Finally the day came when she was to be freed to enter on her new job. It happened that I waked up very early that morning, long before all the others, and I was startled at the sight I witnessed.

Halka, the hardened, the defiant, whom I had despised as a traitor and renegade, was kneeling by her bed, saying her prayers in Polish. There was a rapt, almost fanatical expression on her face.

"Holy Mary, pray for me," she murmured. "Saint Casimir, watch over me—help me to see it through!"

I stirred a little in my bed. Halka jumped up quickly, threw herself on her pallet, and apparently, in a minute, she was fast asleep.

Later, when the guard came for Halka, and the other women gave her a curt contemptuous good-bye, I smiled at her.

“Good luck, Halka,” I said.

She glanced at me sharply and said nothing, but we both understood.

III

The Talisman

TAP-TAP, tap-tap, tap-tap," gently at first, then boldly, insistently. The sound was coming from a steam pipe running parallel with the floor and extending into the next room. A social Revolutionary got up from the plank bed where she had been lying, walked to the corner and listened, then shook her head.

"I thought perhaps it was one of the Comrades," she said, "but I don't make any sense out of the letters. It's not our code."

"Tap-tap" again, this time more impatiently.

The Natziratl (Captain of the Guard) will be here in a minute," said the Social Revolutionary. "Whoever it is, he must be a new one. He doesn't know the game. I'm going to warn him to shut up."

Picking up a wooden spoon, she dragged it along the pipe. "Scr-a-a-tch," the sign in the prisoner's wireless code signifying the end of a sentence. Silence—and none too soon. In

a few minutes the shuffling felt valinki of the guard were heard outside the door, the metal plate over the glazok, or peephole, was softly raised, an eye appeared at the opening, and after a brief survey of the room, an invisible hand put out the electric light.

The Social Revolutionary yawned, stretched herself out at full length on her bed and went to sleep. The other women did the same, all except a young girl on the bed in the corner just over the steam pipe. For a long time she laid with her hands behind her head, her open eyes staring fixedly at the ceiling, her thoughts revolving in an endless circle, reviewing all the events that had led to her imprisonment.

"Who had given her away?" The more she thought the less she could make it out.

Less than a year ago she had been living in Esthonia with her father and mother, working as a stenographer in one of the government offices in Reval, and then came the news of Emilia's arrest. Emilia was her younger sister who had run away with a Russian officer three years before. They heard nothing of her until a homecoming Esthonian brought word that she and her husband had been arrested, and the latter shot. Emilia was reported to be in prison somewhere in Moscow.

There was no one in Moscow who could send her food or ordinary comforts and no accurate information could be obtained as to her probable fate. Having married a Russian, she was a Russian subject, and the Esthonian Mission was powerless to help her. Something must be done.

Then Emilia's sister hit upon a plan. Professing great sympathy with Communism, she applied for membership, and after a few months' probation, was admitted to the party. Little by little she won the confidence of the party members until at last she obtained what she had been working for, the job of secret courier between the Esthonian Communists and the Esthonian Soviet in Moscow. Apparently the Communists were not aware of the fact that her sister had been arrested, she had been careful to spread the impression that she was ignorant of her whereabouts. Besides the fact that her parents had a small farm near the Russian frontier made it easy for her to use the peasant contrabanders, whom she had known all her life, to slip across the border and evade the frontier guards.

On her first trip to Moscow she made careful, furtive inquiries as to Emilia. Finally she found out that she was in the Secret Prison of the Checka in the Lubyanka, ill,

half starving and expecting a baby in a month's time.

The next time she brought a package of nourishing food, clean underclothing and medicine, and on the day when prisoners were permitted to receive *peredachas* (food packages), she brought it to the prison herself, thinking that her identity would not be known. A bland official received her.

"Step this way, please," he said, opening the door into an inner room. "Now hand over your papers," he continued, "you are under arrest."

The next day she had been subjected to a grilling cross-examination that lasted four hours. She was accused of having had secret communications with her sister, of having betrayed the party, and of being an Estonian spy, the tool of the smug bourgeoisie.

"Tell us the truth," the judge repeated over and over again, mentioning people of whom she had never heard.

"But I have told you the truth. I never heard of the persons you're asking me about," she insisted.

"We know better than that," answered the judge. "Do you realise what it means to face a firing squad?—out with it!"

"I've already told you," she answered, "that I knew nothing of my sister or her

activities, only that she had been arrested. We thought perhaps she was dead. My mother was dying herself, from the worry and suspense. I came to Moscow, and made use of my party connection, if you like, to find her, nothing more. I have never betrayed a comrade or a trust."

"You're a clever one," he scoffed. "We have the proof of your activities."

"Show me the evidence," she implored, but he only laughed.

Since then she had been put through the third degree five times, each time without result. The net was tightening about her. There seemed to be no escape. "God, what a world! Was there any place," she wondered, "where people lived simple, normal lives?"

Just then she heard a faint scratching sound underneath her bed.

"Ugh, rats!" she shuddered, and curled up in a small knot under her schouba, which served as blanket as well, for she had been arrested without any baggage.

The scratching kept on steadily. Listening closely, she perceived that the sound was not made by a rat. A sharp instrument was scraping the plaster on the other side of the partition, close to the steam pipe. She leaned over and listened again. Some one was making a hole in the wall. Fascinated she

glued her eyes to the spot in the semi darkness. Her bed was close to the window, and the light from an arc lamp in a court outside cast a faint glow through the whitewashed panes into her end of the room.

The worker on the other side was making progress. In about an hour, gazing steadily at the spot, she saw the plaster on her side begin to crumble and suddenly, next to the pipe, appeared the point of a rusty nail, which was turned and twisted until an opening about an inch in diameter had been made.

Jumping out of bed, she put her ear to the spot. Some one was listening on the other side too. She could hear heavy breathing. Then some one tapped softly. She tapped in answer, and put her ear to the aperture. A man's husky voice on the other side of the partition whispered:

"Who's there?"

"Chto?" (What?) she answered bewildered.

"For God's sake," said the voice, "isn't there any one in your room who speaks English?"

She did not understand a syllable at first, except the word "English," but she had studied a little English in the university at Dorpat, and she tried to remember the almost forgotten phrases.

"I spik a leetl."

"Good," was the fervent response.

"You Englishman?" she enquired.

"No, an American."

She gasped. Long years before she had an uncle who had gone to America. They had heard fabulous tales of his wealth. Before the war he had sent them letters—sometimes presents at Christmas, but since the beginning of the Great War they had heard nothing from him.

"Know you my uncle in Brookleen," she demanded, "Ivan Gregorivitch Tomingas?"

"Never heard of Tommy," was the cheerful answer, "but say, if he speaks English as well as you do, he's all right."

"What you say?" asked the girl. A chuckle was the only reply.

"Why they arrest you?" she pursued.

"Well, you see, I went to college, and I read a lot about an old gentleman named Karl Marx. Ever hear of him?"

"Da, da," she said quickly, "yees."

"Good chap, Marx," continued the voice. "I was rather stuck on him. When these people over here started a government based on his ideas I thought I'd come over and help him out. I'm an expert mechanical draftsman."

"What you say?" asked the girl, bewildered.

"I make plans for machines, how to build them you know. I left home six months ago, got a job in a factory here, and worked—hard. The men under me were never on hand for work. I got after the boss about it.

"Don't you know," he said, "that those men are Communists? They are excused to do party work."

"Party work be damned," I said. "You can't run a government on propaganda, you've got to run it on manual labour. A fellow in overalls—wait till I get out, I'll punch his face, see if I don't—looked at me funny. The next day I was arrested as a counter-revolutionary. Huh," he sniffed contemptuously, "I came over here because I was too revolutionary for America, but if I ever get out of this, I'm going back home and put up with capitalism for a while."

"O-h-h!" said the girl vaguely. She understood about half of what he said, but she liked his voice.

"What did they pinch you for?"

"I not understand."

"Why were you arrested?"

Then she told him the whole story. "I now wait to die," she ended.

"Say, that's too bad," returned the kind

voice, evidently concerned. "I don't believe it's as bad as that."

"Ver bad," repeated the girl.

"I'm sorry," he said thoughtfully, "but maybe when I get out I can help you."

"You get yourself lock up again." A laugh was the only reply. Then gently—"Listen, little Comrade, we've both got lots of things we want to forget. I'm so lonely in this damn place I don't know what to do. Nobody in my room speaks a word of English. At least we can talk to each other every night. What's your name? Mine's Bob."

"Vera," she whispered.

Just then there were footsteps in the hall. With a lithe movement, the girl sprang to her feet, flung herself on the bed and covered herself with her coat. Two seconds later when the guard opened the door to let in a new prisoner she was apparently sound asleep. When everything was quiet once more she got up, swept up the tell-tale pile of plaster dust near the hole, threw it in the parashka, crawled back to bed and went to sleep.

All the next day the girl thought over the conversation of the night before, but she did not confide her secret to any of her companions. About an hour after the lights were put out she heard a cautious knock. In an

instant she was under the bed. A small roll of paper protruded from the hole. Pulling it out she unrolled it, and saw a sketch of a pretty girl with masses of dark hair braided and coiled over her ears. Underneath it was written—"This is how you look to me."

Vera laughed. The man had drawn a picture of a Russian type which resembled her on general lines, but, here she smiled complacently, she was really, honestly now, just a little prettier than that girl. But she didn't fix her hair that way. She would change it to-morrow.

She knocked gently. "Here," came a sibilant whisper through the partition.

"Zank you so mooch. That girl ver preety zough."

"So are you," was the reply. "I peeped at you through the keyhole this morning when you went to the toilet. Weren't you wearing a green blouse?"

"Yes, but how you know?"

"Just instinct I guess," with an embarrassed laugh.

"To-morrow you draw your picture—yees?"

"Sure," was the prompt reply.

The next night there was a picture of a broad-shouldered young man with frank, merry eyes, the lower part of his face hidden,

however, by an enormous flowing beard. Underneath was written "some beard."

Vera didn't exactly understand the American slang, but she chuckled over what she saw was evidently a caricature of a very prepossessing young man, and she hid it under her straw pallet.

After that they talked of everything under the sun—of her life at home, of life in America, of the great Idea the man had come so far to serve, of the disillusionment that had come to him with a glimpse into the inner workings of the Machine.

Days meant nothing to Vera after this, she only lived for the stealthy knock and the voice on the other side of the wall, after the lights were out. She and Bob invented all sorts of amusements, riddles, conundrums, guessing games. He began to correct her English, and she to teach him a few Russian words, very seriously, but in reality choking with laughter over his impossible accent.

One day there was much coming and going in the room next door. Several of the inmates were taken to the "Dopros," cross-examination. She could hardly wait till evening to find out if Bob was one of them. Finally night came."

"Vera."

"Yes, Bob."

"Vera, little comrade, I'm going to be let out to-morrow."

"Slava Bog, thank God," said Vera valiantly. She was glad of course—"Glad, glad," she repeated defiantly, but she choked back a rising sob.

"Listen, Vera, there's something I have to tell you before I go. I love you. A few weeks ago I wanted nothing so much as to get out of here, to go home, but now—oh, Vera, I just want to touch you," and he beat with his hands on the partition wall.

Vera closed her eyes. A subtle current seemed to break the material barrier between them. She could almost feel his warm breath on her smooth cheek as she pressed it against the opening.

"Vera—you love me too, don't you? Vera—answer me, I can't see you, girl."

"Bob," murmured Vera, "you, you—oh! more than all else, goloubchik, my darling."

There was silence for a minute. It was broken by Bob. "That's all I wanted to know," he said simply.

"But, Bob, don't you see that it can't do you any good, this our love? You will go home, you will try to forget me. It is the beginning and the end. I must stay here long months, and then perhaps——"

"Stop," came the peremptory voice from

the other side of the partition. "I am not going home. Do you think I'm going to give you up after what you've told me? Listen—I'll promise them anything, anything. I shall go to a great engineer I know, and offer my services to the Soviet government. They won't turn me down. Every Friday you will get a peredacha from me. In it will be a little note hidden where no one can find it—in the hem of my canvas knapsack. I'll report progress to date, for I'm going to work and pull wires until I get you out of this."

"It's no use, Bob."

"Don't," fiercely, "just wait. And, Vera—if they get you they can have me, too."

All the rest of the night Vera and Bob talked in low whispers. What they said doesn't matter as far as this story is concerned. It was just like similar things that are said thousands of times every day all over the world in all languages, and all sorts of places. It was only when it began to grow light that they found the courage to say good-bye.

The next day Vera had a headache and lay on her bed all day without speaking a word to any one. Only once, she opened her eyes and listened intently when some one was taken from the next room.

On the following Friday for the first time,

Vera received a peredacha, but without the name of the sender attached.

"Who's your friend, Vera?" demanded one of her companions.

"I don't know, I'm sure," she said coldly.

That night she unripped the hem of the canvas bag and found a tiny note written on a piece of muslin. It said:

"Sit tight, Vera dear, I'm on the job." She shook her head over the impossible English, but she surreptitiously kissed the note.

The next week Vera received another note, not quite so optimistic, but she liked it even more than the previous one Bob wrote.

"I'll fight this thing out if it can be done. Nothing matters except that I love you, love you. Whatever comes to you will come to me." She hid it between the sole and inner lining of her shoe.

One afternoon the door was thrown open by a prison guard.

"Adena," he demanded.

"Here," said Vera faintly.

"Pack your clothes," he ordered.

While she tied up her few belongings in a handkerchief, he stood quite motionless, "Skoree, quicker," being the only remark he made.

As she went out, Vera's step was steady, her eyes were dry. She was going serenely to

meet whatever fate was in store for her, for she possessed a magic talisman, a piece of dirty muslin tucked in her shoe, on which were scribbled the words—"Nothing else matters, I love you."

IV

The Death Warrant

THE table had been pushed against the wall, and several of the plank beds stood up on end to provide floor space for the dancing. Mlle. Tasya, late of the Imperial Ballet at Petrograd, was going to give an exhibition. As she stood poised in the middle of the room, bare-foot, draped in a peasant shawl that revealed every line of her supple figure, slender as a young birch tree, her chestnut hair forming an aureole around her face, the grim grey walls of the prison room vanished as if by magic. Stretching before us as far as the eye could reach were the illimitable spaces of the Kirghiz steppe. The desert air was sharp and cold, and in the distance sounded the beating of a drum and the tinkle of a camel's bell. A chieftain in an astrakhan caftan sat cross-legged on a Persian rug before the door of his striped tent, his followers grouped about him. Opposite him were his women. One of them rose

slowly, prostrated herself before him. The others started a low rhythmic chant to the accompaniment of a queer stringed instrument, growing faster and louder, and finally rising to shrill ecstasy as she moved, first languidly, then more and more rapidly, until she reached the whirlwind climax of the wild Tartar dance and sank exhausted at the great Khan's feet.

The two women who had been humming the ballet music from "Prince Igor" stopped for breath, the desert scene faded away, the atmosphere of the stifling room seemed unbearably close, the beauty and colour were gone. Tasya rose slowly from the dirty floor. The lovely oval of her face was flushed with colour, her grey eyes luminous, her mobile lips parted in a smile. "I haven't forgotten," she said triumphantly.

"Brava, Tasya," we shouted.

Evfimia Andreevna surreptitiously wiped her eyes. "Gospodi," she murmured, "Molodyetz—youth. She has forgotten—the other." For Tasya a few weeks earlier had been condemned to death.

She had mentioned the fact to us soon after her arrival, but casually, as if it really mattered very little, and she never alluded to it again. For the most part she was serenely cheerful, sitting curled up on her bed in the

corner, talking of art and literature, arguing skilfully in support of Marxian doctrines, for she was an exthusiastic Communist. Her attitude towards the party did not seem to have been changed by the fact that she had been sentenced to death by her own comrades. Of the immediate past she talked very little, only mentioning that she had been employed in a governmental office in Khar'kov, but she often indulged in reminiscences about her life before the Revolution.

As she sat down after the dance was over it was evident that she was living for the moment in a world of memories.

"The last time I did that dance," she said, "a Grand Duke offered me a string of emeralds to do it again for him. It was at the Marinsky opera in Petrograd. I can see it now, the lights, the music, the cheering crowds, the encores, and afterwards my Grand Duke, he was bald and fat, begging me on his knees to dance at a banquet in his palace.

"I laughed at him, threw on my coat and went out to walk on the Nevsk Prospekt with Feodor Schaliapin. We strolled along the embankment until long after midnight, and the street was quite deserted. It was one of our glorious white June nights. A nightingale was singing somewhere in the distance.

'I can beat that,' said Feodor, and he sang. 'Ya vas Lyoubil'—I loved you once; but it seemed to me that I had never heard anything more beautiful. He meant it as a joke, but he made it a poem. And then, I was only seventeen. I had just turned down a Grand Duke and the greatest artist in Russia was singing for me alone."

"And yet all that did not satisfy you, Tasya," I said, for I knew that a few months later she had been arrested for membership in the Communist party, and had been imprisoned in the fortress of Peter and Paul for eight months, or until the March Revolution.

"No," she said slowly, "I was always looking for something I could not find, something worth living and dying for. Nothing I had seemed worth while after I got it, and then," she continued, "rebellion against the existing order of things was in my blood. My grandfather was the son of a rich 'pom-estchik,' a great landlord in the Ukraine. One day when he was riding through one of his father's villages he saw a young Jewish girl whom he thought the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. She was only sixteen, and he was just nineteen. In those days the Jew was a social pariah, but he fell in love with her and married her, so his

father turned him out and cut him off without a kopeck to his name.

“He and his young wife starved together until he had graduated as a physician at the University of Kharkov, and he died of overwork. She only lived a few months after his death and left a little boy, my father, who was brought up by his grandmother. Much against her wishes he left their country estate when he was grown and took up medicine as his father had done.

“While a student at the University of Kharkov he met a ‘gymnasistka,’ a girl student at the Kharkov gymnasium, and married her. My mother was a very brilliant woman, but she was never meant to be a mother. We children seldom saw her. She had been connected with the Nihilist movement since her student days, and she was always going to secret meetings and receiving mysterious visitors after we had gone to bed. Sometimes she forgot to provide money for housekeeping, and if it had not been for our ‘Nanya,’ our old family nurse, who took care of us during Matushka’s long absences, I don’t know what would have become of us.

“Then came the Russo-Japanese war. My father was sent to Siberia as an army physician, and for many months we heard nothing from him. Finally a telegram came that he

was on his way back to Kharkov. We went down to the station to meet him, my mother and I. It was a hospital train filled with wounded, but there was one car containing thirty typhus patients. It had been closed and sealed at Vladivostock to prevent the spread of infection on the way through Siberia. My father and thirty men were in that car. When they opened it twenty-eight of them were dead, my father and the other two were dying. I shall never forget Matushka's face when they told her, though I was only five years old. It seemed turned to stone, and she said a lot to the officers standing by that I did not understand, but there was something about the 'Class War.' I often wondered what she meant. Surely my father had fought in a war against the Japanese.

"After that mother was rarely at home; during the next few years she was frequently arrested and spent most of her time in prison. One day a man came and told our 'Nanya' something that made her cry a great deal, and she finally told us that we would never see Matushka again. She had been taken to Siberia, and a few months later we were notified that she had died in the penal settlement at Nerchinsk.

"Meanwhile our old Nanya was growing

father turned him out and cut him off without a kopeck to his name.

"He and his young wife starved together until he had graduated as a physician at the University of Kharkov, and he died of overwork. She only lived a few months after his death and left a little boy, my father, who was brought up by his grandmother. Much against her wishes he left their country estate when he was grown and took up medicine as his father had done.

"While a student at the University of Kharkov he met a gymnast. As a student at the University of Kharkov he met a gymnast.

"My grandmother hated me. I think she saw a resemblance in me to her Jewish daughter-in-law, and therefore when I was twelve years old, she consented with alacrity to the proposal of our dancing master, who said that I showed remarkable talent for dancing and that he could get me enrolled in the Imperial Ballet School at Petrograd. I was very old for my age, and I soon made friends with the 'Gymnasists' and the students in the University, many of whom were revolutionary. I read everything I could lay

my hands on, went to secret meetings, talked to the student leaders, and soon I found out what I had always wanted to know about the 'class war.' When I made my début in Petrograd I was already a Socialist. Love of adventure had something to do with it perhaps, but deep down was the sense of social injustice I had inherited from my mother, and deeper still the eternal restlessness and idealism of the Jew. I found the expression of my ideals in Communism. I am not such a visionary," she continued, "to think that they can be realised in our generation. Practically I think Communism is a failure but a glorious one. Put to the test we are all individualists even within the party and we are doomed to defeat our own ends, but we have at least had the vision."

She stopped abruptly, and proposed a game of chess. We played for over an hour, but Tasya seemed to be thinking about something else. Finally she pushed the pawns away. "I can't play chess this evening," she said.

For a while we sat in silence. The other women were all playing a guessing game at the other end of the room. Tasya was absorbed in thought. Suddenly she leaned forward, elbows on the table, her chin in her cupped hands.

“Margarita Bernardovna,” she began, “I suppose you have often wondered why I was arrested and condemned to death, and why I take it all so calmly. I was sentenced for a crime I never committed. While I was living in Kharkov I had a visit one day from a former army officer whom I had met in Petrograd before the Revolution. He knew that I was a Communist—I knew he belonged to the old régime, so we both avoided politics. He went away and I never saw him again, but many months later a Counter-Revolutionary plot was discovered in Kharkov. Among the seized documents was a list of persons who might be counted on to help the Counter-Revolutionaries. It had been written down by my officer. Perhaps he thought that as I had belonged to the ‘bourgeoisie’ I might be won over at the last minute. At any rate, there it was, and I could not explain how it had come there.

“I was tried and condemned for treason to the Party. I had many friends who believed in me still, however, so my case was appealed to the Central Executive Committee in Moscow. They have granted a stay of execution in the hope that the man who put my name on the list will be found and forced to confess. I don’t believe they will find him. If

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I were a Christian I should probably say it was retributive justice."

"What do you mean?" I asked wonderingly. Tasya went on as if I had not interrupted her.

"When I was released from prison in 1917 I threw myself heart and soul into party work. After the October Revolution I was sent to the Ukraine to make propaganda among the peasants because I knew their language. When the campaign against Petlura began I was given one of the most important positions open to party members—that of Political Commissar in the Red Army.

"I went to the front with my regiment. My work was no easy task. I had charge of all propaganda among the soldiers, I was responsible for the discipline and morale of the troops, I had to keep an eye on the military commander who was secretly a Monarchist, I had to settle all disputes between the army and the civilian population, and I reviewed the cases and signed the death warrants of all offenders tried before the Military Tribunals.

"At that time we were fighting two enemies. On the front we were pressed by Petlura's men, in the rear we were subject to constant attacks from semi-political bandits who robbed and plundered wherever

they could and at the same time fought for the cause of the Counter-Revolution, or for Anarchism.

"One of them, a White-Guardist, had given us no end of trouble. When we thought we had him cornered he always escaped as if by a miracle, reappearing and reorganising his scattered band in some other part of our territory. At last he was captured and sentenced to death. I reviewed the testimony, and signed the death warrant. There was not a shadow of doubt as to his guilt.

"I was not present at the trial, but I heard from a number of witnesses that his bearing had been quite extraordinary throughout the trial. He was not insolent, cowering or defiant, but cool, alert, collected, and he scorned to justify his conduct or say anything in his defence. He seemed, they said, to be a man of superior education. As a rule, unless there was some particular reason, I never questioned the prisoners, but I felt an overwhelming curiosity to see what this man was like, so I sent for him the night before the day set for his execution.

"When the guard brought him in I was telephoning at my desk. I glanced up hastily, and our eyes met. He was physically the most perfect being I had ever seen, and

the first thought that flashed through my mind was that it was a pity to have to destroy anything so beautiful. As I hung up the receiver I motioned him to sit down. At the same time I told the guard to leave us. I would not need him for an hour. Then I turned again to my prisoner. He was sitting in an arm chair, smoking a cigarette, regarding me oddly through his half closed eyes. It seemed to me that I saw pity, contempt and an unwilling admiration in that veiled glance. It was as if conditions were reversed, and he were the judge, not I.

"He spoke first. 'Well, what do you want with me, Citizeness Commissar?' he asked.

"I tried to speak sternly, but I was irritated to find that my voice trembled, and try as I might I could not meet those eyes. 'I wish to know if you have any final statement to make,' I said. 'You refused to speak at the trial.'

" 'Yes,' he answered coolly. 'I would like to tell you that I have done everything of which I was accused and more. I would do it all over again if I had the chance. I like to live like a gentleman for one thing, and there is no possibility of that in your accursed Soviet state where every one is supposed to be equal. Then I have my ideals, strange as it may seem. I believe in all the old bour-

geois standards you have swept away, and for all your boasted altruism you have only created a new despotism to take the place of the old. The Russian people know it in their hearts, but you have made them inarticulate by means of your Red Terror. Here and there a few men like me speak for them, in the words of your own gospel—the gospel of force.’

“I looked at him in amazement. ‘You dare to say this to me!’ I said.

“ ‘Why not,’ he answered, ‘you will have me shot anyway to-morrow.’

“The bald statement of fact cut like a knife. I looked at him again. I had signed the death warrant of this man. He was at my mercy, and yet somehow I felt that he was master of the situation. In his curiously intent gaze contempt had given way as we talked, to something else, something that made me catch my breath.

“Suddenly an irresistible temptation came to me. I got up, hardly realising what I was doing, and my own voice sounded strangely to me as I spoke.

“ ‘I am going to my room to get some cigarettes,’ I said. ‘I will be gone fifteen minutes, and I have dismissed the guard. It—it is dark outside. The sentinel will not

see you if you climb out the window and go through the garden.'

"In my room I sat on the bed and watched the clock, praying that he would get away safely. He would have fifteen minutes start before I gave the alarm.

"When the time was up and I opened the door he was sitting calmly just where I had left him. 'Why didn't you go?' I gasped.

"He rose from his chair and took my hands in his. 'Look at me,' he commanded.

"I obeyed.

" 'I think you are the most wonderful woman I have ever seen,' he said slowly. 'God made you to be loved, not hated. You are throwing away your divine birthright. It is monstrous that you should be sending men to their deaths without a quiver of compunction, but you will never do it again. I watched you closely while we talked a while ago. You are still a woman in spite of your hideous creed. There is no use of your denying it—you love me, and I knew from the first moment I saw you that you were the woman I had dreamed of all my life.

" 'If I had escaped to-night it would only have meant postponing the inevitable. Sooner or later I would be captured again and shot. Mine is a dangerous trade. Meanwhile perhaps you would forget me. If I die

to-morrow you will never forget me and you will never condemn another man to death.' He stooped and kissed me full on the mouth.

"For a moment that seemed like an eternity my lips clung to his. Then I wrenched myself loose and groped my way blindly to the telephone.

" 'One minute,' he said sternly. 'You will be there to-morrow at dawn when I am shot. Promise me.'

"I nodded assent.

" 'Now call the guard.'

"During the brief interval that elapsed before the man appeared neither of us spoke. I sat with my head bowed on my desk and he stood quite motionless with his arms folded, leaning against the doorpost. When the man came he turned and went out without a word.

"That night I never closed my eyes. I tried to think clearly, to realise what I had done, but I could remember nothing except the look in his eyes, the touch of his hands and the pressure of his lips on mine. I was up and dressed long before the orderly called me.

"The sun was rising as I came into the village square where a platoon of soldiers was drawn up. It scintillated on their fixed bayonets, and on the gold cross above the

village church. A baby cried fretfully in a house facing the square, a mongrel dog followed me and sniffed curiously at my heels; at one side a small group of peasants on their way to the fields had stopped to watch the execution, the smell of lilacs from a near-by garden was wafted over a picket fence hung with the month's washing. I noticed all these details carefully, forcing myself to concentrate my attention on trivial things so that I would seem composed before my men.

"In a few minutes the prisoner was brought out. He was apparently quite unconcerned and was calmly smoking a cigarette. When he saw me standing there a faint smile curved his lips. 'Remember,' he said in an undertone, 'you will never sign another death warrant.' Then he turned to the Corporal of the Guard who stood ready with a handkerchief. 'You needn't bind my eyes,' he said, 'I want to face the sun.'

"The Corporal looked at me. I nodded consent.

"He carefully flicked the ashes from his cigarette and faced the firing squad. 'Ready,' he said.

"I saw nothing more and even the sharp crack of the rifles sounded muffled in my ears. I don't quite know how I got back to my billet or just what happened till I found my-

self after an untasted breakfast sitting at my office desk mechanically going through with the day's routine.

"After that I continued my work as political commissar for just one week. Then I resigned on the plea of ill health and went back to Kharkov. It was no use—I could never condemn another man to death.

"I had committed a crime against the party, and my faith in myself was gone. I despised myself, and yet, I would have done it all over again for another kiss from a bandit, an enemy of the cause of the proletariat. Now you know what I meant by speaking of retributive justice."

Tasya was as merciless to herself as she had been to others, for there is no place for forgiveness in the gospel according to Karl Marx, but there was an unspoken question in my mind to which I felt I must have an answer.

It seemed unnatural that she should, for a principle, voluntarily relinquish her grasp on life. There was something else behind it.

"Tasya," I said, "if he had gotten away, if he had lived, would you have felt the same way about it?"

"No," she answered, "and that is the real reason why I hate myself."

A few days later she was taken away. I

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never knew what became of her. The thought of her, facing a firing squad, was intolerable, and yet, I wondered if, after all, I had a right to hope that she would live to face the tragedies of her lost faith and her memories.

V

Blue Blood

WHEN Alexandra Vassilievna had untied her veil, rolled it carefully between her slender fingers, smoothed out her worn and mended gloves, carefully brushed her hat and coat and hung them on a nail, she proceeded with equal care and precision to unpack her belongings. From her manner any one would have thought that she had just arrived as a weekend guest at a house party.

First she shook out a faded silk dressing gown, and laid it over the foot of her plank bed, then she deposited a pair of shabby satin slippers underneath it. On the window sill she laid an ivory backed brush and comb, a powder box, mirror and various other toilet articles. Then she she attacked the problem of the bed. She had brought her own sheets and pillow, and by judicious patting and shaking, she finally induced the bag of straw that served as a mattress to take on

the proper contour, covered it with a clean linen sheet and an old rose silk quilt.

Having thus installed herself, she sat down calmly on our only chair as if she belonged there, lit a cigarette and remarked, "Now I feel at home at last."

The other inmates of the room, who had watched her, fascinated during these preparations, gradually plucked up courage to ask the usual questions. Soon they began to rain from all directions.

Her name? Was she from Moscow? When had she been arrested? Why? What was the latest news in the "Pravda"? What was the price of bread? Had the government really closed the Smolensky market?

She answered all these queries readily, and with smiling insouciance. Her arrest had taken place in her own apartment that morning—why, she had not the faintest idea, perhaps, she added, because she was a Monarchist. Her name made most of us start. It was, even to me, a foreigner, one of the best known in all Russia—a historic name.

"Bourjeoi," murmured a young Communist with a contemptuous expression.

Alexandra ignored the remark, and began to tell us all the latest news with great gusto. The markets were to be closed on the fifteenth, food was scarcer than ever, there was

a report that there would be food riots. Wrangel had made great advances in the Crimea; the Bolsheviks were fighting among themselves; there was a new play at the Art Theatre.

Then she turned her attention to her companions and began to ask them questions. Insensibly she drew out each woman in the room, till she had the story of every one. She tamed our fierce little Communist by teaching her a new drawn work pattern on the piece of coarse linen out of which she was making herself a "saroehka," a chemise; she showed me how to make entrancing table doilies with the linen thread, ravelled from a bag, which I was using to do crochet work with a bent hairpin, and she soon had us all laughing at her droll stories about the janitor's wife in her house, who had become chairman of the Housing Committee, though she couldn't write the names of her tenants. She had been able to induce the aforesaid lady to supply her with a bag of flour and a bushel of potatoes, by telling her how to win back the fickle affections of her spouse by a flirtation with a Red Army soldier. Never a word, however, about her own affairs, beyond the proud admission that she was a Monarchist, and she was apparently not in the least concerned about her fate.

She played an excellent game of "Preference," or "Vint," told fortunes like a gipsy, and gave Anna Pavlovna, our champion chess player, a run for her money. She even improved our chessmen, moulded out of black bread, and made delightful bishops, which she dried on the radiator.

From the first meal we shared together, Alexandra Vassilievna naturally took the position of hostess. She sat at the head of the table, balancing herself carefully on the wobbly chair, and poured tea for everybody from her own teapot. From brown wrapping paper she cut plate mats, which she distributed, all around. In the centre of the table, she placed her "Babushka," a tea caddy in the form of a fat peasant woman, enamelled in bright colours, and our daily life began to take on quite a different character.

Up to that time, we had been an untidy, disorderly lot. Our belongings were strewn all over the place, and we had little thought about appearances. Alexandra Vassilievna performed her toilet with minute care morning and evening and soon the others began to follow her example. She encouraged our Anarchist to let her cropped hair grow long by telling her what a lovely colour it was; she made poor Vera Mikhailovna, who had not

smiled since she was arrested, laugh, when she recited a piece of doggerel more witty than polite about the great Trotzky, and she won the heart of Elena Petrovna, who was an idealistic dreamer and an artist to her finger tips, by her wonderful recitations from the old Russian poets—Lermontov and Pushkin.

For the first time in several weeks I began to take an interest in my appearance and resurrected my discarded powder box. Our room was transformed into a salon. We ate our meals all together, around the table, instead of perched on our beds with our wooden bowls on our laps, and our food was served in courses by the *dezhyurnyi*. Instead of breaking our bread, we carved it in thin slices with a knife made out of an empty sardine can. Sonya, our peasant girl, washed her filthy headkerchief, and my nailbrush, the only one in the room, was in universal demand.

All this while Alexandra Vassilievna maintained the same attitude of careless gaiety, mixed with a curious reserve. In three or four days she was called for cross-examination, and was gone for over four hours. When she returned, she merely shrugged her shoulders in answer to the torrent of questions. "Tronda—nonsense," she replied shortly, and

proposed a game of Preference. Only a very keen observer would have noticed that she was a trifle pale. At the same time there was a certain exaltation, an air of secret triumph about her that defied description.

Meanwhile, Alexandra Vassilievna's reserve had made her unpopular with a number of her companions. While very friendly, she obviously considered herself superior to most of the women in the room, yet, while rebelling against her influence, every one of them was unconsciously subjugated by it. She dominated the others as if by some inborn right.

I could see, however, that she was under a great strain, but I never asked any questions. Alexandra, like the rest of us, had her story—sooner or later it would come out. Like many prisoners, I was troubled with insomnia, and during the interminable winter nights, when the lights were put out at ten o'clock, and it did not begin to grow light till nine the next morning, I lay awake for hours at a time. Alexandra Vassilievna apparently went to sleep, but one night, when the room was very still, I thought I heard a stifled sob from her bed just across the way from mine.

Raising myself on my elbow, I leaned over and peeped at Alexandra Vassilievna's blond

curly head, buried in the pillows. Her shoulders were shaking. In an instant I was sitting beside her, my arms around her.

"Alexandra, milaya," I whispered, "what is the matter?"

"Oh, I am so tired, so tired," she sobbed brokenly, like a little child, and then bit by bit she told her story. She talked in French, to avoid any possibility of eavesdropping on the part of the others.

Her father, an old Imperial general, had died some time before the Revolution, her mother died when she was born. One of her brothers, a member of the Czar's bodyguard, had been shot in 1917; the other, an officer in one of the Siberian regiments, had disappeared, and for a long time she knew nothing of his whereabouts. Their home, one of the most beautiful in Moscow, filled with rare works of art, had been turned into a People's Palace, and Alexandra Vassilievna, because she had never taken any part in politics, and also because she had a real knowledge of art and literature, was permitted to remain there as official custodian. She was allowed to retain her own room, served as curator and librarian, organising the courses of lectures on Russian authors and artists given in the ballroom for the benefit of factory workers. She found it an interesting,

even absorbing occupation. Like many of the bourgeoisie she felt a certain satisfaction in being able to do something concrete and absolutely non-political, not for the Bolsheviks, but for the Russian people. As her time was much occupied, she was permitted to keep one servant, Stysha, an old woman from their country estate, whose grandfather and grandmother had always served the family. Life, on the whole, was bearable.

Then one day she was told that a strange man wanted to see her. Going to the door, she found her own brother, Alexei Vassilievitch, in the disguise of a provincial Commissar. He was with Wrangel's army in the Crimea and, travelling on forged papers, he had come to Moscow to gain certain military information. She hid him in her room, and for a while he managed to come and go unobserved. Meanwhile she lived in constant terror lest he should be discovered. Every morning he went out on his secret errands, and every night after dark he crept back into the house.

One evening, watching from her window, as she usually did when she was expecting him, she noticed two men in the uniform of the Checka come into the yard.

"I knew they had come for Alexei," she said, "and that he might be home at any

time, so I sent Stysha out by the back way to stop him in the street and warn him. I hadn't any definite plan—my one thought was to gain time and enable him to get away.

"Soon there was a knock on my door, they were there with a warrant for Alexei's arrest. I took the paper from one of the men, a stupid looking workman, and I had almost started to say that there was no man of that name in the house, when the appearance of the soldiers caught my attention. They were probably illiterates. I took a desperate chance.

"Did you say you were sent to arrest a man here?" I asked as coolly as I could.

" 'Yes, Alexei Vassilievitch,' was the reply. 'The Commissar told us.'

" 'You misunderstood him,' I returned. This paper calls for the arrest of Alexandra Vassilievna. The initials are the same, but you got the name wrong. I am Alexandra Vassilievna and you are to arrest me.'

" 'Perhaps you are right, citizeness, said the second man, a dull looking peasant boy,' I thought we were sent after an officer, but what is written on the paper is correct.'

"I gasped with joy. The men were illiterates! I would keep them as long as I could. It would give Stysha a chance to warn Alexei and perhaps he could get out of Mos-

cow before the mistake was discovered and rectified.

“ ‘I’ll come with you as soon as I can,’ I said calmly, though it seemed to me they must notice how breathless I was, ‘but I am not dressed.’

“ ‘Get your clothes on then, and be quick about it,’ said one of the men, ‘we can’t wait here forever.’

“I gave him as scornful a look as I could muster. ‘I shall probably meet a great many of my friends in prison,’ I said, ‘and I must be properly dressed.’

“He said nothing, but sat down stolidly on a chair, and his Comrade did the same. Seeing that they were not going to leave me alone, I proceeded to make a complete toilet, utterly ignoring them. Going to the washstand, I took a sponge bath in sections, put on clean underwear, lighted my little kerosene stove, heated curling irons and waved my hair as if I had been going to a ball.

“Every now and then one of them told me to hurry up. I replied that they could see that I was doing my best. Soon they became intensely interested in the proceedings. Russians of that class are very much like children, and they evidently had a naïve curiosity about my preparations. I applied face cream, wiped it off carefully, made up

delicately and painstakingly, and they watched with spellbound attention while I pencilled my eyebrows and put on just the right amount of rouge. Finally I was dressed. Then I deliberately packed my bag, and announced that I was ready. I had gained over an hour.

"When we arrived at the Loubianka, I felt sure the trick would be discovered, but I was playing in luck. There had evidently been a number of arrests that evening, and a harassed looking individual who was plainly anxious to get away was filling out questionnaires at top speed. He barely glanced at my papers, asked me a few questions, hastily signed the order for my commitment to the prison, and I was whisked away and locked up here.

"It seemed too good to be true. The mistake would not be discovered until I was called for cross-examination. Then there would be the Devil to pay. A few days ago, as you know, I was called to a 'dopros.' I was worried beforehand, not so much for fear of what they would do to me, as on Alexei's account. I wanted to be sure that he had gotten away.

"The sledovatl, who had just received my papers, was furiously angry at the way I had tricked them. I could tell by his manner

that they had not caught Alexei. He is probably far away by this time. I laughed in his face. I was reckless, from pure joy, I suppose. I pretended I knew a great deal more about Alexei's business than I really do, and adopted a tantalising air of mystery just to plague him. That enraged him still further. I am charged with counter-revolutionary espionage, and I shall probably be shot."

I tried to console her by telling her that it did not necessarily mean the death sentence. She would probably be sentenced to a long term of imprisonment for aiding the escape of a spy, but there was no direct proof that she had had part in any plot.

"But that will be just as bad, Margarita Bernardovna," she wailed. "I am not a bit afraid to die, but I am so afraid something will happen to Mariushka."

"Who is Mariushka?" I asked wonderingly. She had never mentioned any one of that name.

"My little dog," she moaned despairingly. "I always fed her myself, she won't take her food from any one but me," and it was several hours before she cried herself to sleep over Mariushka's probable fate.

The next day the guard came for Alexandra Vassilievna. She packed her belong-

ings, put on her hat and coat with the same leisurely nonchalance she always displayed, gave a final dab to her nose with her powder puff, then, sobered for a moment, she turned to the whole company.

"Sit down for a moment and wish me luck on my journey," she said. We sat for a minute in silence. Alexandra turned and kissed me, making the sign of the cross so that the guard could not see—then she turned to him with a flash of her old careless insolence.

"Where next, citizen?"

The man grunted in reply and Alexandra waved us a gay good-bye.

In the doorway she paused for a moment. "Don't forget to add six stitches in the ninth row," she said to Elena who was laboriously crocheting a table mat. The door banged, and she was gone.

VI

Nasyetka

IT was past two o'clock, and the occupants of room 44, who had been undisturbed since the lights had been put out at ten o'clock, except for the switching on of the lamp and an appraising eye at the peephole in the door when the guard was changed at midnight, were suddenly roused by the sound of a key grating in the lock. The door was flung open, and the room flooded with light to admit a new prisoner. One by one sleepy heads were raised from straw pallets to inspect the new arrival.

"Gospodi," exclaimed Maria Alexeivna, a Social Revolutionary who had been a provincial school teacher in her time, "is the Checka going to open a Young Ladies' Institute?"

As a matter of fact, the newcomer, who stood huddled against the door, gazing with a half frightened, half defiant expression at her eight companions, was a slip of a girl, not over fifteen, if indeed she was that old.

Her small pointed face showed white above the tightly buttoned collar of her shabby green ulster; she was hatless, and her restless grey eyes gleamed oddly from a mass of tangled dark brown hair. On her feet were a pair of straw slippers, known to the peasants as "lapiti" and she was stockingless. One small nervous hand clutched her throat, the other was concealed in the pocket of her coat. She had evidently brought no baggage.

"What's your name, dyevotchka?" asked Maria Alexeivna.

"Anna Ivanovna."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Svobodni Rossii—free Russia," was the answer.

"So-o, a little White-Guardist," said Maria Alexeivna reflectively, 'for, under the Denikin régime that was the name given to the "liberated" regions by his followers. "Don't you know that there is no Free Russia any more?"

"For me there will always be Free Russia," answered the child passionately. "I hate your Soviet Russia; and your Red Army—paugh," spitting to emphasise the words. "I come from Kafkaz, from Free Russia I tell you. There in the mountains are men who still love Russia; officers, some of them

from Moscow, working and fighting against your Soviets."

At this a grey haired woman started up from her pallet. "From the Caucasus," she asked breathlessly, "were you in——"

Here she was cut short by a warning glance from her neighbour. "Wait," she whispered, "we don't know anything about the child yet."

The woman who had asked the question was a Royalist, whose son, a former Imperial officer, was hiding in the Caucasus. She was known to have received a letter from him, and she had been arrested in order to force her to reveal his whereabouts.

The girl who had warned her was a Communist, but in prison political differences are forgotten and there is a freemasonry among all prisoners. Confidences are almost never violated, and the bitterest political enemies unite for mutual protection against that ever present pest the stool pigeon, known in Russia as the Nasyetka. Newcomers are never trusted until they have given an absolutely straightforward account of themselves which can somehow be checked up and proved.

No one could have been more innocuous in appearance, however, than the little prisoner, who stood uncertainly for a few minutes,

then raised her hand to her head with a bewildered gesture.

"I—I feel rather faint," she said uncertainly. At this, the atmosphere of suspicion changed to one of instant sympathy. There was no spare bed, but two were pushed together so that three could lie on them abreast. "Take off your coat and lie down, child," said Maria Alexeivna kindly.

"No, no, thank you, if you don't mind. I'm a little cold," answered the girl, clutching her collar tighter than ever as if she feared it would come open of its own accord, shrinking from the kind hands that would have helped her to undress and get to bed. She took a piece of white bread and a bit of salt herring from one of the women, and devoured them ravenously, after which, without another word, she curled upon the very edge of her bed and fell into a sleep of utter exhaustion.

In the morning she slept late, and was only roused by her companions when it was time to go to the washroom. Once there, she made no effort to unbutton her coat, but stood in a corner watching the others as they stripped to the waist and splashed themselves with cold water in the big tin trough that served as a common wash basin.

"Why don't you wash, Anna Ivanovna?"

demanded one of the women. A sullen stare was the only answer. When they returned to the room, she made no attempt to join in the general conversation; she even had no desire, apparently, to watch the "godanye," the fortune telling with cards, which was going on in a corner. She lay on her bed with her eyes closed, but evidently not asleep, listening to the talk around her. Although she tried to relax, nevertheless there was something curiously strained in her attitude that was not lost on the other women.

"I'm going to talk to her and find out who and what she is," whispered Maria Alexeivna.

Then, sitting on the side of her bed, in spite of her apparent reluctance, little by little she extracted the child's story.

Anna Ivanovna, according to her own account, was the daughter of a priest in one of the small towns on the western slopes of the Caucasus. More than a year previously, she had been arrested with her mother and father, who were accused of having secret communications with the remnants of Denikin's forces in the mountains. They were brought to Orel for trial, and after some months in prison, were tried, condemned to death and shot. Anna Ivanovna was held for some months longer, and then sent to Mos-

cow, to be committed, she said, to a reformatory for juvenile criminals. In the prison at Orel she had been forced to trade off all her clothes, her toilet articles, and everything she possessed in order to get enough bread to keep alive. Underneath her coat she wore nothing but a filthy torn chemise, she was covered with vermin, and she was ashamed to undress. In Orel, the other prisoners had laughed at her and beaten her, and the guards had only laughed too. In Free Russia she had been free indeed—and happy. In Soviet Russia she had found nothing but misery and suffering. Her father said there was no God in Soviet Russia; only Anti-Christ. He had come to rule the Russian people as the old legend said he would some day, and he was—Trotzky!

It was a plausible convincing story, and it was told with an appearance of utter sincerity that disarmed suspicion. Anna Ivanovna's warm-hearted companions were completely won over. One woman contributed a piece of underwear, another a towel and cake of soap, a third a comb, and so on, until each had given something to supply the deficiencies in her toilet. In the evening she was induced to take off her ulster and her chemise in the washroom, and to scrub herself from head to foot, after which she put on the

clean undergarments given her by her new friends. Maria Alexeivna herself combed out the tangled mop of hair with a fine tooth comb, and when supper time came Anna Ivanovna received her share of the food sent the other prisoners, which had been pooled and was distributed to all alike by the "starosta," or room chairman.

At first she took these kind offices sullenly, rather suspiciously as if she suspected a motive behind them all, then gradually she grew more friendly and less taciturn. Her mind was a strange mixture of sophistication and childishness. At times she told stories of vice and degradation among the women prisoners at Orel which made her listeners wince, interspersing them with coarse jokes and oaths picked up from the soldiers. Again she would retail the folk legends told by her grandmother in front of the stove on long winter evenings, and she never tired of listening to stories told by an American woman of "Dyadya" Remus, the black uncle who told a little white boy all 'bout the doings of Br'er Rabbit and Br'er Fox. She still had strange fits of silence, usually when there were whispered conversations going on, and occasionally she joined in political discussions with a rather uncanny knowledge of the subject. Whenever counter-revolutionary activities were

mentioned she grew intensely bitter against the Soviet government, and she was particularly friendly with the Royalist lady.

While the other prisoners were still rather cautious in talking before her, more from the fear that she might inadvertently repeat during a cross-examination stray remarks picked up in the room than for any other reason, no one, not even the wary Communist, felt any cause for suspecting her or her story, until, one morning, she refused to go to the washroom on the day the Prison Commandant made his rounds, which he was in the habit of doing twice a week. The next time the Commandant was due she did the same thing, and the women coming back rather earlier than usual, caught him slipping out of their room. Then suspicion became a certainty, but it was decided to give no sign to Anna Ivanovna, and to treat her just the same as usual.

Meanwhile as the days went on, it was evident that a change was coming over Anna Ivanovna. Always a nervous irritable little thing, she became subject to curious moods and strange fits of depression. Finally one morning she got up rather earlier than usual, and it was obvious that she had something to settle with herself. For at least half an hour she paced restlessly up and down the

room, tossing back her dark mane of hair with an occasional spasmodic gesture, refusing to eat her breakfast, or answer when she was spoken to. At last she stopped short in the middle of the room and clasped her hands tightly behind her back.

"I can't stand it any longer. I've got to tell you something," she began. "It seemed easy at first, because no one had ever treated me like a human being since I was arrested, but you have been so kind to me I can't go on.

"I lied to you—lied, lied, do you hear? I'm not going to be put in a reformatory. I'm going to have fine clothes, good food, plenty of money and go to the ballet school when I've earned it all by spying on you and others here in the Checka. I'm a Nasyetka—a spy, that's what I am. I was told that I was to stay in this room for two weeks and that I must listen to and report everything you said. They said you wouldn't suspect me because I'm nothing but a child. When I'm through here I must go to another room and tell the same story. It's all true except the part about my being half starved and beaten and having no baggage. I said that to get your sympathy. My clothes are in the Commandant's office.

She paused for a moment, and then went on wearily, speaking with a visible effort.

"I don't suppose I can ever make you understand. I am just a miserable coward. At first I felt it would be glorious to die for Free Russia. I laughed at them when they asked me to tell who came to our house from up in the mountains to talk to father and mother. When they were sentenced to death anyway without my testimony it all seemed different. I had no one to fight for any more. Every one in the prison at Orel seemed to be out for himself. Nobody spoke a kind word to me, I was desperately lonely, and I was so young, I wanted so to live! Then they told me that I would be shot too unless I was willing to be a Nasyetka.

"But I want to tell you that you can trust me—all of you in this room. You, you," here her voice broke in a sob, "you've been too good to me." Then, turning away abruptly, she flung herself on her bed and burst into a wild uncontrollable fit of weeping.

For a few minutes there was silence, then the American walked over and sat down beside the pathetic little figure, and placed a hand on the heaving shoulders.

"Anna Ivanovna," she said softly, "Anna Ivanovna, we've all known what you just told

us for some time, but it hasn't made the least bit of difference. Tell all you want about us—nothing you have heard in this room can do us the least bit of harm. Plenty of older and far wiser people than you have done just what you did under the same circumstances."

"Then you don't hate me? You'll treat me the way you've always done?"

"Of course."

After that Anna Ivanovna was like a different person. She was quiet, gentle, even affectionate, the last trace of the furtive watchful attitude entirely disappeared. It was useless to try to exact a promise from her to give up her rôle of Nasyetka, but Maria Alexeivna and the others tried to convince her that children under sixteen were never shot in Moscow for any crime whatsoever, and that the worst she had to look forward to in case she refused, was a term in the reformatory. She seemed to believe them, though it was hard to tell what was going on inside her troubled little brain. As the time drew near for her to be transferred to another room, she talked very little, and sat a great deal apart, evidently fighting a battle with herself.

"I'll probably be moved to-day," she announced one morning. Then deliberately gathering up the few necessary undergar-

ments and other articles that had been given her by her room mates, she tied them up in a handkerchief, put on the torn chemise and her old green coat, and sat down on her bed to wait for the prison guard. They watched her in silence. If she took the bundle when she left she would probably start on the level with her new companions. If she left it she would probably try the old hard luck story again.

Finally a step was heard outside, the door was unlocked and a guard appeared. "Pack your clothes," he ordered sharply, looking at Anna Ivanovna. She got up slowly, put out a hand to take the bundle, then drew it back again and stuck it in her pocket. With the other hand she grasped her collar with the old familiar gesture and turned to the others with a wan smile that was sadder than any tears.

"Good-bye," she said. "I guess I'm still a coward after all," and she was gone.

VII

The Wedding Journey

THE men in the next room had just finished the daily concert for our benefit, performed by the orchestra of five. There were two exceptionally fine falsetto tenors, who acted as violins, a comb virtuoso, a human cornet and a "bass drum." It was a wonderfully realistic performance, considering that, besides the comb, the artists did not boast a single musical instrument. Although it was strictly forbidden to make any noise within the rooms that could be heard outside, the guards never interfered with the concerts. In fact they usually gathered in our end of the hall to listen, and we could hear delighted laughs and chuckles after each selection. Popular songs and dances formed the bulk of the repertoire, with the "Internationale" for the finish, but this evening the artists had chosen the old revolutionary hymn, the "Varschiavianka," as the closing number. We rapped approval on the partition.

Anna Petrovna sighed. "Ilya taught me that tune in 1905," she said, "when we were students together at the University of Kharkov. Gospodi, I wish I knew where he is now."

It was at least the twentieth time that day that Anna Petrovna had alluded to Ilya, her husband. Waking and sleeping, he was never out of her thoughts. They had been arrested the week before on their wedding day, just as they had fancied that they were about to enjoy relative safety, and long deferred happiness. Neither was young, and both had sacrificed the best years of their lives to the proletarian revolution—the Frankenstein they had helped to bring to life. They were Social Revolutionaries.

A few months earlier they had met in Siberia for the first time in nearly fifteen years, and had renewed an old romance begun in their student days. They were too much immersed in party work, however, to devote much time to the renewal of old ties, as they were both working underground to organise revolts among the Siberian peasants. The affair had been started in Omsk, but it was prematurely betrayed by a provocator, and Anna Petrovna and Ilya had been warned in time to make a getaway.

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They were too well known in Siberia to take the chance of remaining there in hiding, and deciding that a large city is the easiest place in the world to lose oneself in, had come to Moscow in disguise under assumed names. Ilya got a job in the Food Commissariat, and Anna, who was a school teacher by profession, had secured a position as kindergartner in a children's home. Finally they decided that they would marry, settle down in Moscow and give up party work, so one morning they went to the People's Court, showed their workers' books, paid the small fee demanded and were registered as man and wife.

That afternoon, on her way home from the school, Anna Petrovna was halted by an official from the Checka, who displayed a warrant for her arrest, made out in her new name. Evidently they had not discovered her identity, but it was probable that Ilya had been found out, and that she had been arrested in order to serve as a witness against him. Undoubtedly he would be arrested that evening if they had not already got him, but until she was sure of the fact, and could in some way find out what was to be the nature of his testimony, she was unwilling to testify under cross-examination. It was important that their stories should tally.

Therefore, being an experienced "ousnik," convict, for she had spent many months in prison under the Czar's régime, she had immediately opened lines of communication by tapping on the walls and steam pipes in the party code, notifying other comrades of her arrest and asking for news. Meanwhile she practised obstruction, refusing point-blank to go to cross-examination, and beginning a hunger strike which would eventually make her so weak that she would be unable to leave the room in case the guards attempted to use force.

So far no one had been able to locate Ilya, and, in spite of her courage and determination, Anna Petrovna was beginning to lose heart. When the guards came to take us to the toilet that evening, she dragged herself from her bed and followed us listlessly, for she had gone without food for three days and was beginning to feel rather weak.

In the washroom she stood leaning against the wall, too indifferent even to wash her face, with her head resting on the partition. Suddenly she was galvanised into instant attention.

"Slava Bog," she whispered, "Ilya is in the next room. I recognise his cough. Watch the door, somebody."

Then gently, and with infinite caution, she

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began to tap rapidly on the partition. "Anna," she spelled out softly, "Anna Petrovna." She repeated it three times, and waited breathlessly. A stealthy rap from the other side—then silence. The guard was walking past in the corridor. His steps died away and the knocking began again.

"Ilya—here," came the answer. "Man next door—does not know—code. No communication."

At this moment the guard approached again, the tapping ceased abruptly, the bolt on the door was withdrawn, and we were taken back to our room.

Anna Petrovna was radiant. She had found Ilya at last. After that she could hardly wait till morning, and when we went to the washroom the tapping began again.

"Look—crack behind tank—left side—letter."

Thrusting her fingers between the tank and the wall, Anna Petrovna found securely wedged in the crack, a note written in cipher on cigarette paper, and thrust it in her belt. Back in her room she proceeded to decode it painstakingly.

"Ilya writes that he was arrested at home," she said. "He had a chance to destroy all our papers. The man who informed against him does not know me

because we always worked separately in Siberia. Ilya has told them that he met me in Moscow, and that I know nothing of his previous activities. He says that they have enough evidence on him to send him to Siberia for trial, but there is nothing against me. He is hoping I have not been to cross-examination because he thinks I may get off as they have not discovered who I am. I must simply corroborate his story and stick to it."

That night she wrote an answer stating that she had refused to testify, hoping to hear from him how matters stood, but that she would now go to cross-examination and answer all questions.

For supper, she ate a small piece of bread and a little soup. The next morning she notified her examining judge that she had called off her hunger strike and was willing to be cross-examined. In the afternoon she was called to a "dopros."

She came back beaming. "Everything is all right," she announced triumphantly.

"Then you will probably be free in a little while?" I asked.

"Free to follow my own heart," she answered with a smile, but she quickly changed the subject, retailing some of her reminiscences of pre-revolutionary days, which held

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us spellbound for hours at a time, whenever she chose to entertain us.

Anna Petrovna had belonged to a revolutionary family. Her father was a Nihilist, who had been shot for complicity in the assassination of Alexander II, and her mother had been arrested and thrown into prison, where she died of a broken heart. Anna, then a tiny baby, was taken to the country by a great-aunt, who had a small estate near Kharkov, and there she grew up, learning to know the peasants and to sympathise passionately with their wrongs.

When she was sixteen, she ran away from home and entered the university at Kharkov, where she became a member of the revolutionary student group which later joined the Social Revolutionary party, and she and Ilya began their boy and girl romance. She took part in the Revolution of 1905, escaping from Petrograd to Moscow, where she lay for a while in hiding after the memorable "Bloody Sunday."

"Once," she told us, "the house where I was hiding was surrounded and searched by agents of the Ohkrana, the secret police. I was only a slip of a girl then, and I managed to escape observation by lying flat on a crossbeam in the attic where I stayed for five days—three without food. I shall never

forget the first time Maria, an old family servant, smuggled up half a loaf of bread and a cup of milk." Finally, thanks to this same Maria, Anna Petrovna was smuggled out of the house in a basket of dirty clothes, and escaped from the laundry shed, where the baskets were stored, by climbing out of the window at night.

She had forgotten the address of the people who were to take her in, and wandered through the streets of Moscow for thirty-six hours, before she met some one she knew, quite by accident, and was directed to the proper house. There she met Ilya who had been waiting for her for almost a week, and was nearly frantic with anxiety and suspense. Ilya was to escape from Russia by way of Finland, with Lenin, then known to his comrades as Nikolai Ulianov, and Anna Petrovna was to follow whenever she got a chance.

"I was rather wild in those days," she confessed. "I was a good actress, and rather pretty, so I dyed my hair, changed my entire appearance by means of careful makeup, and secured an engagement in a cabaret much frequented by officers on leave from Siberia. I began a desperate love affair with one of them, and received an invitation from them to travel in their private car on the trip to

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Vladivostock. From Moscow to the Pacific Coast the trip was a wild orgy. My part often sickened me, but I played it through, and in Vladivostock I managed to give my officer the slip and escape as a stowaway on a British merchant ship.

"I had no money, there were all sorts of difficulties that had to be overcome. I travelled under a false name, with the passport of a poor Frenchwoman whom I nursed in a small town on one of the islands in the Malay Archipelago, where we stopped on our way back to Europe. After she died I stole it, and succeeded in passing myself off as a French governess, giving lessons for a while to an English family in Ceylon. Finally I reached Geneva, where I hoped to find Ilya, but there was no trace of him. I lived there for a few years, then drifted back to Siberia, where I taught in the Zemstvo schools until the revolution, except for several terms in prison in Irkutsk for spreading revolutionary propaganda among the peasants.

"All this while I never married. I could not forget Ilya, and then we met in Siberia. You know the rest. But what's the use of struggling against fate? Chto boudyet to boudyet—what will be will be. Married yesterday after fifteen years—divorced to-day by order of the Checka," and she

shrugged her shoulders resignedly. I said nothing, but I was puzzled. This was very different from her remark to me a short time before when she had come back from the "dopros."

For the next few days Anna Petrovna and Ilya continued to exchange notes. He had been to a dopros; he was to be sent to Siberia the next week. Anna Petrovna would probably be held a little while longer. They had not questioned him for some time about her. She was to take care of herself, keep out of politics, and—forget him. They were not meant to live together in this existence. In another life perhaps—who knew, for like many Russians Ilya was something of a mystic.

One morning she found a farewell note. "We leave to-day," it read. "I leave a piece of my heart with you in Russia. God keep you, goloubushka, my darling."

Anna Petrovna read it, but she only smiled. She seemed extraordinarily serene at the prospect of parting with Ilya, perhaps forever. Towards noon she began to pack her things.

"What are you doing, Anna Petrovna?" we asked. "You surely don't expect they will let you out this afternoon.

She laughed. "Did you really think I was

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going to stay behind?" she demanded. "I gave my real name at the cross-examination and told them I was working with Ilya in Siberia. He doesn't know it of course, but we will meet in the prison van this afternoon."

"But, Anna Petrovna," I stammered, "do you realise what you have done? You may have signed your own death warrant."

"I shall have two weeks in a box car with Ilya," she answered slowly. "It will be our wedding journey."

That afternoon there was a great commotion outside. A heavy motor vehicle rumbled into the yard. All along our corridor doors opened and shut—the Social Revolutionaries were being herded together for the trip to the railroad station. Soon a man came for Anna Petrovna, and her eyes were glowing as she kissed us good-bye.

When she had gone, we were wild with excitement. We wanted to see her meeting with Ilya, so we pulled a bed close to the window, and standing on it, two of us peeped, through a hole we had scratched in the whitewash, down into the prison yard. There stood a big Black Maria, near it a little group of men and women, among them a tall man in a squirrel cap with ear-tabs, whom we recognized from Anna Petrovna's

description as Ilya. In a few minutes she came out of the prison door. Their eyes met, then their hands, clinging as if they could never let each other go. The love in her glance killed the unspoken reproach in his, and hand in hand, they got into the bridal coach that was to take them on their wedding journey.

VIII

Off With the Old Love

TO look at her no one would ever have associated Amanda with romance. She was short and fat, with a bad complexion, high Mongolian cheek bones and pale blue eyes with white lashes. But she was full of romance, she just bubbled over with it. Most of her worldly goods, contained in a small picnic basket with a lid, consisted of scraps of paper on which she had inscribed her romantic yearnings in execrable Finnish verse, and which she insisted on translating into even more execrable Russian for our delectation.

Love was so beautiful in Finland, she said. The men loved deeply and truly, and the women were models of fidelity. If a man deserted a girl, she drowned herself in some sapphire Finnish lake set in rows of emerald fir trees, or she suffered unutterably, silently till she pined away.

The men—ah, what noble creatures the men were in Finland. They went around

with big knives in their belts, and if a man had a rival he stuck him in the back on a dark night and left his body lying in the snow. Love was a serious as well as a romantic business in Finland.

She herself, she explained, was in prison all on account of her cavalier, who had been implicated in a little shooting affair in the Finnish Soviet at Petrograd, where the assembly was held up, and nine unarmed leaders shot by their opponents who came armed to the meeting. Her cavalier was a great hero. He had killed two of them. Here Amanda broke down and howled like a small woolly dog, and gave us no peace until I offered her a salt herring.

She skinned it tearfully, devoured it in two bites, curled up and went to sleep. She snored abominably, but this was preferable to her conversation which flowed on in an unceasing stream during her waking hours. Her Russian was almost incomprehensible and when we could not understand her, she flew into a violent temper. When she was not talking or sleeping, she wept vociferously.

After we had had about a week of this sort of thing, Amanda began to hint darkly at suicide, and talk of pining away. As she had a better appetite than any one else in the room,

there did not seem to be much danger of such an eventuality, but continued harping on the theme grew rather tiresome, and we began to try to devise some means of putting a stop to it.

Nina Alexeievna told her fortune with cards, and predicted that she would be wooed and won by a tall dark man with a scar on his left cheek. Amanda grinned for a moment, then pulled out a large red handkerchief and burst into tears.

"I shall always remain true to my cavalier," she wailed forlornly.

In the room adjoining ours there were a number of men with whom we had established clandestine means of communication through a tiny hole in the wall near the baseboard around a steam pipe that passed through the partition. By lying flat on the floor, and placing lips and ears alternately to the opening, it was possible to hold long conversations with our friends on the other side and we amused ourselves for several hours every evening in this manner. While we were talking we always placed a sentinel at the door, to give warning of the approach of the guards who were apt to pop in on us at any moment. In the winter they wore "valinki," felt boots, and it required sharp ears to detect their approach.

One evening I rapped on the wall as usual—six short and three long raps—a signal to my particular friend on the other side, a man from Turkestan who was a devout Babist. We used to hold long discussions through the hole on Oriental mysticism. To my surprise a strange voice answered in broken Russian, with an accent similar to Amanda's:

"Boris Alexeivitch not here, him gone."

"Kto vuy? who are you," I demanded.

"Finski," was the answer.

"Come here Amanda," I called as loudly as I dared, "here's a Finn. Maybe he's your cavalier. Anyhow he will probably have news of him."

Amanda jumped down from her bed and waddled to the corner, throwing herself down at full length on the floor, and then an unintelligible conversation began.

First there was a running fire of questions on Amanda's part, followed by tears, grunts, a series of muttered imprecations accompanied by vigorous wavings of her white stockinged legs in the air, and finally coy gurgles and expressions of satisfaction. When she got up and brushed the dust off her dress, Amanda was beaming.

"My cavalier, they shot him," she announced, "but it don't matter I got another just as nice. We love already."

"But Amanda," I exclaimed, horrified, "you told us only a little while ago that you could not live without your cavalier."

"Ya, so I did," she answered, "but I not know I could get another one then. That kind of love beautiful in Finn Poetry. Life, him different. The man in next room he tell me my cavalier had another girl in Petrograd. Him better dead; if he live maybe I break my heart, maybe I kill him. Anyway I love now. Oh, it is so beautiful," and she clasped her hands with an ecstatic expression.

"What did I tell you?" chuckled Nina Alexeievna. "Is he tall and dark, Amanda?"

"I ask him," she answered eagerly, and thereupon we were treated to another lengthy conversation through the hole.

"Him have brown hair," Amanda announced when it was over, "and he tall man. How you guess, Nina Alexeievna? At last I find my mate."

That night there were no tears, and Amanda snored tranquilly till morning. Immediately after breakfast, in spite of our protests, for it was very dangerous to attempt conversation with the adjoining room during the daytime, Amanda was at the hole. She tapped for some time without getting any answer. At last there was an answering tap, and a strange voice informed her that

her cavalier was not there. He had been sent to the prison yard with several other men, to operate the electric saw that provided wood for heating purposes.

Amanda was in despair. She could not talk to her new cavalier until the day was over. She sat on her bed, industriously scribbling verses in Finnish. These she carefully rolled and pushed through the hole that evening.

She also began to save bread, and her ration of cigarettes, which she had hitherto divided among us. Every morning when we went to the washroom she stuffed a small package of bread or tobacco behind the tank. Every night there were long conversations at the hole, and she resented it bitterly when the others demanded their turn.

Amanda lived in a waking dream. She could talk of nothing but her cavalier, and finally she decided that she must see him at his daily task. So she used to climb up on the window sill and apply her eye to the small peephole at the top, from which she had an occasional glimpse of the burly Finn feeding logs to the whirring saw, whose sharp metallic buzz for six or seven hours a day, drove some of our more nervous companions to the verge of hysterics.

Several times she was almost caught in the

act by the guards, and once I dragged her down, just as one of them entered the room. She fell with an awful thud on the bed underneath the window, but fortunately the guard was too much occupied at the time by a flirtation with pretty Anna Ivanovna, a buxom peasant girl from Tula, to have eyes or ears for any one else.

"You must be careful, really, Amanda," we said, but she flew into a regular tantrum and threatened to report our clandestine conversations if we interfered with her. On the whole, however, though she exposed us all to danger of punishment by her imprudences, Amanda was more endurable than before, and everything went well for at least a fortnight.

One morning there was a great deal of scuffling and moving in the next room, which always denoted a change of inmates. I put my eye to the keyhole and saw all our friends being transferred bag and baggage, to the room across the hall.

"Amanda," I said, "your cavalier is leaving."

Amanda gave a piercing shriek and was promptly seized with a violent attack of hysterics, alternately laughing and crying until she had the whole corridor in an uproar. The guards threatened, coaxed and com-

manded and we administered bromides, but she would not be quieted for several hours.

The room to which the men had been moved was directly opposite the one they had formerly occupied, ours being at the end of the corridor, and as the building jugged out in a projecting wing at this point, the partitions adjoined only in one corner in which stood our parashka, close to the door and in full view of the glazok or peephole through which the guards were accustomed to survey the room whenever the spirit moved them.

As soon as it was dark, Amanda perched herself on the parashka, and began to tap on the partition. Soon there was an answering knock, but as neither Amanda nor her Finnish swain knew the prison Morse code, it was a most unsatisfactory means of communication, and they took to writing notes and hiding them in the washroom.

All this while Amanda's passion grew apace. "I shall die," she said tragically, "if I cannot hear that much loved voice."

"You douraka—idiot," said Maria Petrovna, "can't you see that it's impossible? The guards would catch you and then we would all be sent to the cellar."

Amanda looked obstinate and said nothing. Late that night I was awakened by a

gnawing sound. There were dozens of mice in our room who nibbled and scratched the minute the lights went out, but this was a different sort of noise.

"It must be a rat," I thought to myself, shuddering as I crept down lower into my blanket, but as I listened I realised that it was a rasping sound that could only be produced by a metallic instrument. Peeping out from under the covers, I looked in the direction from which it came, and in the darkness, faintly illumined by the arc light in the court, I could just make out Amanda sitting on the parashka, boring into the partition wall around a steam pipe that passed through it about eighteen inches from the floor. She worked steadily for about half an hour, then swept up the plaster she had loosened, threw it into the parashka and crept back to bed. In a few minutes she was lying on her back snoring peacefully.

It was sheer madness to attempt to make a hole in that spot, but I knew that open interference with Amanda's romance would be worse than useless, so I got up very quietly, stole over to the parashka and picked up the instrument, which she had concealed behind it. It was an iron spike about six inches long which we had found in a corner, where it had evidently been dropped and over-

looked by the workmen who had made some repairs previous to our arrival. We used it as a hammer to mend our plank beds which were always falling to pieces, and the pointed end was useful in small game hunting in the cracks in the wall—not an exhilarating sport, but rather important to our physical comfort. However, it would have to go, and I regretfully dropped it in a deep crack in the floor where it could not be fished out.

The next morning Amanda got up and looked behind the *parashka*.

“Where is the hammer?” she asked, “I want to fix a nail in my shoe.”

There was a hasty search for the missing instrument, but to no avail.

“It must have been swept out yesterday by accident,” said Maria Petrovna.

I said nothing, but Amanda looked at me and scowled. For some reason she suspected me.

After our return from the washroom, she was in a most evil humor. There had been no note for her that morning. Her cavalier was not as attentive as usual. The next day there was still no letter, and Amanda lapsed into a settled melancholy. Her cavalier had not been removed from the adjoining room—that much she had ascertained by peeping through the keyhole when the men were

taken to the washroom, and by glimpses of them at work in the yard below, but he no longer answered her taps on the wall, or her passionate missives concealed in the washroom.

"Perhaps he has found another girl in the room on the other side," wickedly suggested Nina Alexeievna.

Then she laid out the cards "Tak—yes," she said decisively. There is a dark girl who has just come into his life."

Amanda flushed to the roots of her sandy hair. Her small piglike eyes flashed fire.

"I make him sorry," she muttered between her teeth.

During the entire day she sat in stony silence, staring straight before her and refusing to touch any food. Towards evening she took her stub of a pencil and a scrap of brown wrapping paper, and composed a long and laboriously worded note, which she tucked in the bosom of her dress.

In the morning, when the buzz saw in the yard began to hum, she mounted on the window sill, and opened the small loose pane at the top, known as the "fortichi" which was our only means of ventilation. It was too high up to give her a view of the yard, but by standing on tip-toe, she could put her hand through the opening. In it was the note she

had written on the previous evening. Before we could stop her she had dropped it in the yard.

There was a universal groan of dismay.

"Amanda!" we exclaimed, "have you taken leave of your senses? One of the guards surely saw you throw out that note. There will be the Devil to pay. What did you do it for?"

Amanda calmly stepped down from the window sill. Her eyes were hard and bright.

"I do it for purpose," she said defiantly. "I tell my cavalier all I know about his part in Finnish plot, how I never tell unless he leave me for other girl, how I pine away and suffer because him untrue to me. When guard take note to judge I think he shoot him."

No one spoke, and we gave her wide berth as she walked to her bed and laid down complacently, an ugly smile on her face.

Nina Alexeievna gave a repentant sob.

"Oh what have I done," she gasped. "That crazy girl!"

"Amanda, why did you do it? I was only joking with the cards."

"Too late," said Amanda stolidly. "Anyhow he did not answer my letters, that not like cavalier," and she rolled over on her side and went to sleep.

A few hours later a guard came and called Amanda's name.

"Where you take me?" she demanded.

"You know better than I, Citizeness," he answered grimly, and Amanda was taken away, probably to the cellar to meditate on her breach of discipline.

Later she would undoubtedly be called on to give testimony as to the contents of her note. Perhaps she would go scot free, perhaps she had overstepped the mark and implicated herself as well.

We would never know, but we all heaved a sigh of relief—all except poor kindhearted, scatterbrained Nina Alexeievna, who cried herself to sleep that night over the tragic consequences of her illtimed joke. The Finns are a cruel as well as a romantic folk.

IX

Counter-Revolution

IPPOLITA ALEXANDROVNA did not look like a conspirator. She was a fussy little woman of about forty, with prominent blue eyes, a funny screwed up mouth like a button, iron grey hair pulled back from her forehead and done up in a hard knot, and an unending flow of small talk. She was very mysterious as to her family and connections, but judging by the names which she managed to bring into the conversation every other minute, she was on intimate terms with the entire Russian aristocracy.

“Poor Princess B——” she would say condescendingly, “I used to know her so well in the old days. She was a great friend, more than a friend, my dear, of Baron K. She was a clever woman, the princess. She had her husband appointed governor-general at Irkutsk, so she could pursue her little affair with the Baron undisturbed. The Prince never knew he was the laughing stock of Petrograd.

"Then there was Countess L——. She was half German. During the war she was the head of a Red Cross unit in Curland. One day we heard that she had been ordered back to Petrograd, and was under house arrest. The Count shot himself. You never could tell who was a German spy in those days."

Sometimes she regaled us with accounts of court balls and gala performances at the opera, describing the costumes, headdresses and jewels worn by the guests in minute detail, giving us intimate glimpses of pre-war society in Petrograd and Moscow.

Once we were discussing General Wrangel, whose advance in the Crimea was then causing the Soviet government considerable concern.

"Wrangel was always regarded as a light weight in Petrograd," she said. "No one thought much of his character or his ability as an officer, but he was a handsome scalawag and he had a way with women. All the younger married women in military circles were quite mad about him, and it was owing to the imprudence of one of them that he got his first promotion," and then she told us the following story.

One night the General in command of the division in which Wrangel was a captain gave a dinner to which all the staff officers

then in Petrograd, as well as the officers of his own staff were invited. The Minister of War was present and it was a very splendid affair.

Among the guests was the General's most formidable rival for an important position on the General Staff. The two had long been enemies, though they always preserved the outward amenities, and it was well known that on more than one occasion each had resorted to devious means to circumvent his rival but up to that time they had been running neck and neck.

Captain Wrangel was in no friendly frame of mind towards the General at the time of the dinner. He had just been turned down for a Colonelcy in the division. It happened, however, that the General's wife who was very pretty, very spoiled and much younger than her husband, had noticed the handsome young officer on his staff, and she insisted, in violation of all precedent that he should be placed on her left at dinner. On her right sat her husband's rival.

During the dinner Captain Wrangel made himself so charming to the General's wife, that she threw discretion to the winds. Before the dinner was half over, he felt, under the table, the pressure of a little foot against his own. He returned it with interest.

In a few minutes the satin slipper of his pretty neighbour rested on the instep of his cavalry boot, creeping higher till it finally touched his knee. He thought rapidly. He did not care a fig for the General's wife or her feelings, he had not gotten what he wanted from her husband, and here was an opportunity to humiliate him before his most deadly enemy.

Stooping down with a quick movement he seized the slipper of the General's lady and deposited it foot and all on the table.

"Look what I found in my lap," he said to the assembled company.

Immediately the table was in an uproar. The lady screamed and fainted, the rival general guffawed loudly, the injured husband turned purple in the face and ordered his insolent young captain put under arrest to await court martial. But there never was any court martial. The affair was hushed up, and Captain Wrangel was demoted several points and sent to a provincial garrison, where he bided his time.

From that moment the General's political importance waned—he had been made ridiculous. All Petrograd was laughing at him. His rival captured the coveted post, the General sought and obtained a governorship in the provinces. Soon afterwards Cap-

tain Wrangel was recalled from exile and received a Colonelcy in the division commanded by the General's erstwhile rival.

Ippolita Alexandrovna's fund of reminiscent gossip along similar lines was inexhaustible, but she also retailed current news and details of her domestic life.

Her husband, who she hinted, was a very important personage indeed, had deserted her in the early days of the Revolution, and had escaped to Poland. She had been forced to take a position in the Moscow Food Administration to support herself and her ten year old boy Misha. He was a wonderful boy, according to her account. She had never been willing to place him in a "priyout" one of the Children's Homes established by the Soviet government. He went to day school and helped around the house. She was deeply concerned as to what would become of him after her arrest, as she had no relatives in Moscow.

With regard to the causes leading to her arrest, she was rather incoherent and not altogether ingenuous. There had been a "Zosad," a raid in her apartment house, and numbers of people had been arrested. She had just come home from work and was getting Misha's supper when a detachment of

soldiers had arrived, ordered her to pack her things and go to the Checka.

She was absolutely innocent of course, she had never meddled in politics, but she was held as an important witness in a serious matter, and she hinted at underground activities which she could disclose if she had a mind, "But they'll never get anything out of me," she added—"never."

The others did not know what it was all about, but they were vaguely alarmed. Ippolita Alexandrovna was not the kind of woman to inspire confidence, and although she talked so glibly about her monarchist connections it was easy to see that she did not belong to the class with which she tried to identify herself. But she undoubtedly knew most of the former bourgeoisie of Moscow and Petrograd, and she was unbelievably, impossibly garrulous, and also we suspected, something of a coward as well. It was possible that under cross-examination she would give information that was exceedingly damaging if there was really any sort of a plot on foot in Moscow.

Though most of us were Socialists or revolutionary sympathizers there is a tacit understanding among all political prisoners, that however much they may differ on political matters outside, "inside" they combine and

give mutual aid and advice as to the best means of outwitting the judges under cross-examination.

"See here, Ippolita Alexandrovna," we said, "do you know what it means to be cross-examined? You'll you have to collect your thoughts and make up your mind what you're going to say."

"Trust me," said Ippolita Alexandrovna importantly, "they'll never find out from me what was going on."

The next day she was called to cross-examination, and she came back beaming.

"They won't detain me very long," she declared, "I had a very pleasant talk with the 'sledovatl' (examining judge). He just wanted to know the names and addresses of half a dozen people who came to see Anna Petrovna, the woman who has the apartment over mine," and she gave the names of several well known generals, a former high official and one or two members of the aristocracy.

"And did you tell him?" we asked.

"Certainly," she replied, "they are all absolutely correct people who don't mix up in politics."

"Did he ask you why they came there?" I demanded.

"Y-e-s," she replied a little less glibly, with a rather furtive look.

"What did you say?"

"I told him they held meetings of a literary society. That's harmless enough isn't it?"

"The worst thing you could possibly say," muttered Olga Vassilievna, an old political prisoner. "Do you, by any chance, know why they went there yourself?"

Ippolita Alexandrovna pursed her lips and said nothing.

In a few days she was again summoned to cross-examination. She returned with her eyes as big as saucers.

"They've all been arrested," she said in an awestricken voice. "I told the judge I couldn't imagine why, and then he asked me if Madame —— hadn't a son with Wrangel, and if she had heard from him recently. I said yes, but he only wrote her about the price of sugar in Crimea and said he had been laid up in the hospital with an infected foot."

We groaned. Madame K—— was probably arrested by this time.

A few days later Ippolita Alexandrovna was called for the third time to a "dopros." She had gossiped once more about all her friend and neighbours, who it seemed, un-

doubtedly frequented the apartment where she lived in considerable numbers. They had asked her particularly about one Vassili Vassilievitch, who lived on the ground floor, and received many visitors. When questioned as to the nature of his activities she had said that he sold books and pamphlets, which was true. Vassili was a poet and kept a co-operative book shop. His apartment would no doubt be watched and he and all his callers arrested.

There was also a girl who had recently come from Latvia among Ippolita Alexandrovna's acquaintances. She had brought letters to many persons in Moscow, and Ippolita Alexandrovna had let the cat out of the bag inadvertently.

We soon heard from her and from several others, through our wireless communications at night by means of the steam pipes. Following Ippolita Alexandrovna's testimony, there had been mass arrests. All those arrested were accused of having part in a gigantic counter-revolutionary conspiracy the exact nature of which was hinted at but not revealed.

A few of them happened to be members of the Social revolutionary party and membership cards had been found among their effects. Others were former Monarchists and

letters from émigrés and "White Guardists" had been found in their possession. No direct testimony had been obtained, but several prisoners had inadvertently mentioned the names of friends or acquaintances and these had also been arrested.

The cross-examining judges became more menacing and put their prisoners, most of whom were bourgeois ladies of timorous dispositions through the third degree. Evidently the republic was in danger, threatened by a mysterious organisation that spread over half Moscow, but all the prisoners stoutly maintained their innocence and insisted that they had no political motives in frequenting Ippolita Alexandrovna's apartment house. The Checka on the other hand, apparently regarded it as the headquarters of the conspirators.

Finally, Ippolita Alexandrovna was called again to a "dopros," and grilled for several hours. When she came in once more, her jaunty air was gone, her face ghastly white, and she was weeping bitterly.

"Gospodi," she gasped, "the worst has happened. They have found out everything, and I am ruined. What will Misha do without his Momochka? The plot is discovered."

"For goodness sake, Ippolita Alexandrovna, are you raving?" exclaimed Maria

Petrovna, "You don't mean to tell us that you and all those people were really in a counter-revolutionary plot."

"No, no," wailed Ippolita Alexandrovna despairingly, "but you see I have an uncle who is a Koulak, a big farmer. He used to smuggle in potatoes to me, and I sold them secretly to many people who were formerly my husband's clientele. He was one of the most famous hairdressers in Petrograd and he had a branch in Moscow. We knew everybody in Russia.

"They all came to me to get their potatoes, and when I was arrested I was afraid the Checka would find it out and I would be tried for speculation, so I just told different stories about them to account for their visits to the apartment. I thought that if I put them on another track they would never find out about the potatoes, but they have been watching the apartment. My uncle Mikhail was caught as he was bringing in two pouds this morning, and the game is up."

So it was, and so was the great conspiracy—up in smoke. That day, shorn of her importance as a political prisoner Ippolita Alexandrovna was transferred to the Moscow section of the Checka which is reserved for speculators, and I am afraid her Misha did not see her again for many months. Mean-

while several hundred more or less loyal citizens languished for longer or shorter terms in prison till their records were thoroughly investigated, suffering, not for a lost cause but for the sake of a few sacks of potatoes.

X

Evraika

WITH the coming of Marianna Yakovlevna discord entered our ranks, for Marianna Yakovlevna was a Jewess. There was no doubt about it as she had elected to tell us herself on the very day of her arrival. Otherwise no one would have suspected the fact, for there was no hint about her of Semitic ancestry. She was tall, lithe and graceful, with a firm chin, a delicately molded sensitive mouth, and clear grey eyes set far apart under a wide low brow framed by thick masses of soft brown hair with a coppery tinge. Her nose was too short and her face too broad for beauty, but there was an indefinable charm about her that was more alluring than mere physical loveliness.

She was brought in with three other prisoners; a terrified old peasant woman with a shawl over her head, carrying a basket of black bread and onions; a short haired Anarchist, with beady black eyes, a high color

and a shrill tongue; and a slip of a girl, a provincial school teacher.

While they all talked at once and squabbled for the two vacant beds, Marianna Yakovlevna quietly proceeded to spread her blanket on the floor, and to sort out her few belongings, chatting pleasantly and easily in her low, musical voice, telling us all the latest news and gossip from the outside, but saying nothing about herself.

Paulina Andreevna surveyed her with an approval, which she seldom vouchsafed to newcomers, and she forgot to begin her usual running fire of questions. Paulina Andreevna was the wife of a general, and she never condescended to friendly relations with newcomers until she had extracted their pedigrees.

It was not until we were seated at dinner, munching the "Lipioschki" (Russian short-bread baked with raisins), brought by Marianna Yakovlevna that Paulina Andreevna began her questionnaire.

"What is your name, my dear?" she asked. "Perhaps I knew your father in the old days."

"My name is Marianna Yakovlevna," was the quiet answer, "and I don't think you knew my father. He was a Rabbi Ya Evraika—I am a Jewess."



Paulina Andreevna pushed back her wooden soup bowl and gasped. Anna Casimirovna, who was a Polish countess, got up from the table. The daughter of an Ukrainian "pomestchik" (landowner) sniffed audibly, the little school-teacher looked frightened, the peasant woman stared and muttered "Jgid."

The colour surged up in Marianna Yakovlevna's pale cheeks, but she said nothing and the meal ended in silence.

Afterwards there was a whispered consultation at the end of the room while Marianna Yakovlevna sat apart, her cheeks flaming, but otherwise quite composed. I sat on my bed and listened.

"She's probably a spy," said Anna Casimirovna.

"I won't sit at table with her," declared Paulina Andreevna.

The peasant woman spat in token of disapproval. The other inmates, three social Revolutionaries and the newly arrived Anarchist exchanged remarks in low tones, and the afternoon passed in an atmosphere of constraint and suspicion.

When the guard came in the evening to take us to the washroom, he announced that owing to the fact that the plumbing was out of order and only one water tap was avail-

able, we would be taken in two relays instead of all together as usual.

"You go first," I said to Paulina Andreevna, "I will go with Marianna Yakovlevna."

"We will wait too," said Maria Petrovna, one of the Social Revolutionaries.

"So will I," declared the Anarchist.

When they had gone Marianna Yakovlevna turned to me, her eyes full of tears.

"Thank you," she said simply.

After that we were divided into two camps. We took our meals at different times, sat in different parts of the room, and pooled our food supplies in two lots. Consequently I was thrown much with Marianna Yakovlevna and the Social Revolutionaries. The latter were splendid women, all of whom had been in the Revolutionary movement for many years, they were well read and intelligent, but their interests were centred in party activities. Marianna Yakovlevna, who belonged to no political party, had but one communing passion and that was love for Russia.

In spite of her Jewish ancestry, she was wholly Russian. She had the history of the country at her fingertips, she could quote for hours from all the great Russian poets, she loved the language, legends and folk

songs of the people, and above all, Russian art, from its humblest expression in the Kustari, the peasant industries, to the great religious art of the middle ages, and the works of the modern painters. She was an authority on the Ikons (religious images) of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and on peasant embroideries.

"Oh, how I wish I could take you to see our old churches in the North," she exclaimed, and we often used to plan excursions, to be taken in some happier time, to visit the old cathedrals and monasteries in the provinces.

Meanwhile, I managed to patch together, piecemeal, the story of Marianna Yakovlevna's life from chance remarks which she let fall from time to time.

Her father had been in charge of a congregation at Smolensk, but being a man of considerable means and a great scholar, he had retired after some years and lived on his country estate. It was unusual in those days for Jews to own landed property, but there were some families in the Western provinces included in what was known as the Jewish pale, where Jews possessed rights not granted them in Central Russia, who belonged to the landowner class.

Marianna Yakovlevna grew up with the peasants, close to the land, and she learned to love it as did few of the Russian proprietors, who spent most of their time in Moscow and Petrograd or abroad—in Paris, Berlin, Vienna or on the Riviera. While clinging to the spiritual ideals of her race, she became essentially a Russian.

It was at the Institut, the boarding school in Petrograd, where she was sent when she was fourteen years old, that she began to realise the racial barriers and prejudices separating her from her companions. She was one of them yet not one of them—she was a Jewess. In the University, where the life of the students was much less hampered by tradition, she did not feel her aloofness so much. Many of the students were Revolutionaries and professed to be Internationalists.

“When we make the Revolution,” they said, “there will be no social or racial barriers left in Russia,” and Marianna Yakovlevna, believing them, prayed, hoped and worked for the Revolution.

When it came at last she was happy, happier than she had ever been in all her life. Russia was part of her birthright. Jew or Gentile, every one who loved Russia could give the best that was in him towards the inauguration of the new era.

songs of the people, and above all, Russian art, from its humblest expression in the Kustari, the peasant industries, to the great religious art of the middle ages, and the works of the modern painters. She was an authority on the Ikons (religious images) of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and on peasant embroideries.

"Oh, how I wish I could take you to see our old churches in the North," she exclaimed, and we often used to plan excursions, to be taken in some happier time, to visit the old cathedrals and monasteries in the provinces.

Meanwhile, I managed to patch together, piecemeal, the story of Marianna Yakovlevna's life from chance remarks which she let fall from time to time.

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Then it would make everything easy for her and Pavel Ivanovitch. He was a student like herself, a Revolutionary and an idealist, but with no real force of character. His father was a *Chinovnik*, a high government official. They had been in love with each other for several years, but neither had asked their parent's consent, knowing that they would meet with opposition. When the Revolution came, bringing, as she thought, social and political equality for all alike, Marianna Yakovlevna went to her father.

"Father, I love Pavel Ivanovitch," she said. "I want to marry him."

The old Rabbi looked at her severely.

"What! My daughter marry a Christian," he said. "Never!"

Pavel Ivanovitch's parents were equally obdurate. Their son should never marry a Jewish girl with their consent. Pavel Ivanovitch raged and stormed and talked about the class conscious proletariat and the sweeping away of race and caste prejudices. He became a Communist and a Commissar but he did not insist any further on marrying Marianna Yakovlevna.

"Perhaps we had better wait a little, *goloubushka*," he said. "Our parents are old, they cannot adapt themselves at once to the new order," and Marianna Yakovlevna

agreed gladly for she also did not want to cross her father's wishes in the matter.

So Pavel Ivanovitch went to the front with the Red Army, and Marianna Yakovlevna took a position in the Commissariat of Education in Moscow. Shortly afterwards her father died, then Pavel's parents. There was no longer any reason why they should not be married, but Pavel was at the front; he wrote that he could not get leave of absence, and letters came from him at longer and longer intervals. This did not worry Marianna Yakovlevna. She trusted him implicitly, and besides she was very happy in her work. Politics interested her but little.

"Until our people are educated," she said, "they will never be able to determine what kind of government they want. The Communist dictatorship is the means, but not the end. The end will be shaped by the Russian people."

Therefore, like many of her class, known in Russia as the "Bez Partini," she believed in supporting the Soviet government, and worked loyally with it, though not for it but for Russia.

In the office where she worked there were a number of bitter opponents of the Soviet government, belonging to the factions that supported the short-lived Constituent Assem-

bly, and although they did not take her entirely into their confidence Marianna Yakovlevna was more or less conversant with what was going on. One day one of her fellow employés came to her.

“Marianna Yakovlevna,” she said. “I have some important papers that must be copied and returned where they came from to-day. I can’t possibly do it all. Will you help me? I need not tell you that it is very confidential work. Don’t speak of it to any one.”

She agreed. What she read was enough to convince her that the papers had nothing to do with the work of the office, and that there was a plot on foot, but it was not her business to play policeman and she kept her information to herself.

A few days later, a number of the employés of the department were arrested, Marianna Yakovlevna among them. There had been a spy in the office, and it was known that she had copied some stolen papers, but she resolutely refused to reveal their contents, or to give testimony against her fellow workers. She was held for contempt of court while her judges were endeavouring to procure further evidence against her. A statement of her part in the affair was all that was necessary to secure her freedom, but she

preferred staying indefinitely in prison to betraying a trust.

When I had learned the whole story I wanted to tell the others but she swore me to secrecy. "It doesn't matter," she said with a pathetic smile. "They would never believe you. I am a Jewess."

One evening a new prisoner was brought in. She was a young girl, with a rather pretty baby face, swollen and disfigured by weeping. Her blonde hair was gathered into an untidy knot and there were dark circles under her eyes. No sooner had she arrived, than she threw herself on her bed sobbing convulsively, and soon she was seized with a violent attack of hysterics.

It was Marianna Yakovlevna who applied cold compresses, rapped for the guard and sent for a dose of valerian, and it was to Marianna Yakovlevna that she finally told in broken sentences how she came to be arrested. She was implicated in the same plot as Marianna Yakovlevna's fellow workers, though employed in another office. The girl was terrified and told all she knew, and putting two and two together Marianna obtained a fairly clear idea of the plot and of the persons involved.

"Oh, I'm so afraid," she moaned, "I don't want to die. And then there is Pavel Ivano-

vitch, my husband. He is a Communist and he is at the front. I met him when I was working in the Red Cross a few months ago and we were married before I came back to Moscow. He has no idea that I belong to a secret organisation. I didn't dare to tell him, and I could not break my promise to the party, though I knew when I married him that I should give up my party work. If they find me guilty they may arrest him too. How can they believe he knew nothing about what I was doing?"

Marianna Yakovlevna loosened her grip on the girl's hand. Her face had grown white.

"What is your husband's family name?" she asked in a low, tense voice.

"Matvyevitch—Pavel Ivanovitch."

Marianna Yakovlevna got up slowly and groped her way to her own pallet.

"I want to think," she murmured in an indistinct voice.

All afternoon she laid there, silent, her hands behind her head. She refused to eat her supper, saying that she felt unwell, and that night, long after the others had gone to sleep I heard a muffled sob. I made my way to her bed in the darkness and sat down.

"Marianna, milaya," I said.

She grasped my hand.

"Pavel's wife," she whispered fiercely, "a little pink and white doll afraid of her own shadow, but she is a Christian! And I believed in him and all his kind. I voluntarily gave up my liberty because I would not betray a Gentile who was nothing to me." She paused.

I knew only too well what she was thinking. If she chose, she could give testimony that would go far towards convicting many of the conspirators, and she could ruin Pavel Ivanovitch. The temptation was very great.

Bending over I put my arms around her.

"I would trust you, Marianna Yakovlevna," I whispered, "even though you don't trust yourself," and I left her to make her great decision alone.

All night long she tossed and turned on her pallet, and so did I. Finally I dozed off into a troubled sleep. The next morning Marianna Yakovlevna was the first to wake. I found her dressed and standing by my bed when I awoke. She was pale and looked very tired, but the bitterness had gone from her face. I knew she would come through.

During the day she had a long conversation with Pavel Ivanovitch's wife, who was utterly unsuspecting. She reviewed each word of the girl's testimony, telling her what

to say in anticipation of every possible question.

"If you do as I say," she added, "they can't trap you."

That afternoon and the next, Pavel Ivanovitch's wife was called to cross-examination. Both times she came back radiant. Things were going much better than she had hoped for. The judge was convinced of her innocence. She would be freed in a few days. Marianna Yakovlevna said nothing.

A week later the guard came and ordered her to pack her clothes, and the girl impulsively threw her arms around Marianna Yakovlevna's neck to kiss her good-bye.

"Pavel Ivanovitch and I will be grateful to you for the rest of our lives," she exclaimed. "I shall tell him all about you."

Marianna Yakovlevna's face grew tense, and she drew back slightly from the girl's embrace.

"You needn't trouble yourself," she returned coldly. "He may remember me. I knew him slightly when we were students together in Petrograd."

After she had gone Marianna Yakovlevna and I sat together in the dusk and talked for a long time. The Social Revolutionaries were playing "Sixty-six," and the Anti-Semites were gossiping as usual in their cor-

ner of the room. The Polish girl was holding forth as usual, and a stray bit of conversation reached me—"you can never trust a Jew."

My face flamed. "Let me tell them, Marianna Yakovlevna," I begged. But she shook her head.

XI

The Girl Without a Country

THE session of the "Fifth International" was nearly over, and the members, consisting of the inmates of room twenty-three, representing ten different nationalities, accorded subdued but enthusiastic applause to the impromptu vaudeville performance which was the chief feature of the meeting. Pani Lapinskaya, a Polish lady attired in "Kasionni" B.V.D.'s, the undergarments usually issued only to male prisoners but which we possessed by virtue of agreeing to mend them, did the Mazurka with Nata, a peasant girl from the Ukraine, draped in a vivid flowered shawl. Vlasta Ivanovna, who came from Prague, and I executed an American Cake Walk, followed by the rendition on my part of some negro camp meeting songs; little Madame Gautier, Russian by birth, Italian by ancestry and French by marriage, gave us "Madame Lulu," and then we proceeded to take up the only piece of business on the

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minutes, the registration of the new member. There were no elections, every prisoner automatically becoming a member on arrival, merely by declaring her nationality.

All through the meeting, the newcomer, who had arrived only a few minutes before it was called to order, sat on her bed, gravely watching the proceedings.

If it had not been for her thickset, rather dumpy figure, which suggested nothing so much as a sturdy Shetland pony, she would have been almost beautiful. She was very young, not more than twenty at the most. Her thick bobbed golden hair stood out around her head like an aureole, combed back over a low white brow with delicately marked eyebrows, and she had a complexion like a Saxe shepherdess. Her eyes were her loveliest feature. They were a vivid gentian blue, and fringed by long dark lashes. She looked like an overgrown child, and it was only on close scrutiny that you could notice the fine lines at the corners of her mouth which indicated experience and perhaps suffering. She spoke Russian perfectly, in a liquid guttural that was not unpleasant, but which carried with it a trace of foreign accent.

Maria Petrovna, our chairman, turned to her.

"It gives me great pleasure," she began, "to welcome you as a member of the Fifth International, branch twenty-three. Name please."

The newcomer hesitated for a second—"Sonya."

"Nationality?"

There was a long pause. Finally she looked up, tossing back her blonde curls with an almost defiant gesture.

"I have no country," she answered quietly. Ten pairs of eyes stared at her curiously, suspiciously, incredulously, but she seemed quite unmoved.

She vouchsafed no further explanation, but began to talk of other matters. Now it is an unwritten law in prisons that newcomers must give at least a reasonably full account of themselves. Even so, no one is completely trusted until she has either been vouched for by some one in the room, or until she has been in prison for at least two weeks. Excessive volubility and excessive reticence are looked on with equal suspicion, for the Nasyetka, the professional spy, is ever present and her methods are many and devious.

Consequently Sonya was open to suspicion, and we watched her closely for the next week. No one was rude or unkind to her,

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but there was an invisible wall separating her from every woman in the room.

At first she did not seem to notice it. She was quiet, even indifferent, displayed no curiosity with regard to the whispered conversations that went on in different parts of the room, and she made no attempt to draw us out or to get us to talk.

She was also ignored, apparently, by the prison authorities. This was a sign in her favor, for Nasyetkas are usually called frequently to fake "dopros," cross-examinations. At times, too, I caught her looking at us when we were all talking and laughing together, with a wistful expression on her face like a child who has been left out of a game. One evening several of us were discussing her.

"I believe she is a Communist," said Pani Lapinskaya.

"A paid spy, no doubt of it," added Madame Gautier.

"I don't believe it," said good-hearted Maria Petrovna. "Whatever she is, the child is honest."

"Well, let's put it up to her anyway," I proposed. "It can't do any harm and it may do some good."

So Maria Petrovna was appointed spokesman, and that evening when we were all at

tea around our deal table, she leaned across and looked straight at Sonya.

"Sonya," she said gently, "we are all comrades here, and we want you to be one of us. We don't ask to know anything about your affairs, but we feel it is only fair to you and us to ask you to tell us a little more about yourself."

The girl looked at her steadily for a moment. Then she began to speak in a low, even voice, devoid of all emotion.

"My name is Marie Rapp," she said. "I was born at Marienburg, in what was formerly known as Curland. Now it is part of Latvia. My mother was a Lett, my father a German. We had a home in the country very near the border, and my father, when we went out for long afternoon drives, used to take me across the frontier and lift me out of the carriage when I was just able to toddle.

"'Mariechen,' he would say, 'you are on the soil of the Vaterland. Never forget, my child, that you are a German.'

"My mother said nothing. She was of old Lettish stock, without a drop of foreign blood, and was the daughter of a well to do farmer. My father, who belonged to the Junker class, was considered to have made a mesalliance in marrying her. She was, all

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her life, passionately devoted to her own people. As a young girl she had taken part in the Lettish national movements that were always so sternly repressed by the Russian authorities.

"She had delightful forbidden books in the Latvian language, which we always spoke when we were alone together, though in better class families Lettish was never spoken. They always used either Russian or German. From her I learned all the Lettish folk songs and legends. I was interested because the stories she told me appealed to my imagination, but I adored my father. He was so big and strong and he had such a merry laugh. My mother was always sad and thoughtful. I wanted to be like him, a German.

When the war broke out I was just fourteen years old. On the day before the mobilisation order was issued he slipped away at night, crossed the frontier and enlisted in the German army. A few weeks later the Russian forces were sweeping through East Prussia and he was killed resisting the invasion of the Vaterland, at Tannenburg. We heard of his death many months later from a Lettish neighbour who had been taken prisoner by my father's regiment and had escaped and crossed the lines to Curland.

"During the early part of the war Russian

troops were billeted in our village, and how I hated the Russian officers, with their imperious ways and their contempt of the 'Lettish swine.' They requisitioned most of our horses, they killed a number of our cows, and they took the most of what crops we could raise. Oh, how I longed for the Germans to come—and then they came!

"One morning the command was given to evacuate our village. The troops withdrew accompanied by crowds of panic stricken Russian and Lettish refugees, carrying all their movable belongings in carts, barrows, packs and bundles. We stayed behind. My mother was glad. She hated the sight of a Russian uniform, and I exulted. My Germans were coming.

"By afternoon a regiment of Uhlans marched into the village. At first they were orderly enough; horses were stabled, billets assigned, the inhabitants told what was required of them. They were stern, it was true, but no one was mistreated.

"The captain of the regiment was quartered in our house. He was a big, blond man, something like my father. He looked at me sharply when he entered the house and his glance made me uncomfortable, though I could not tell why. I was too young to know what it meant, and I put aside the vague

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distrust I felt, smiled, and spoke to him in German. Up to that time he had spoken to all of us in Russian.

“ ‘Ach, you speak German, Fraulein?’ he exclaimed.

“ ‘I am German,’ I said proudly.

“ ‘Then you must have supper with us this evening.’

“Much against my mother’s wishes I joined them that night at supper. I had taken particular pains to look my best and the Captain beamed approval. Everything went well until they began to drink glass after glass of vodka. Then I began to hear jokes and remarks that, innocent as I was, made my cheeks burn. My officer stopped smiling and leered instead, and his hand was hot when he reached across the table to touch mine.

“ ‘I—I must go to bed now,’ I stammered, rising to my feet.

“ ‘Not so fast, Mariechen,’ said the officer thickly, ‘you must give me a few kisses first,’ and he seized me round the waist.

“At that moment I heard a cry and saw my mother standing in the door.

“ ‘Leave my daughter alone, you German pigs,’ she shrieked.

“One of the men at the end of the table jumped up and hit her full in the mouth.

She sank to the floor unconscious. I screamed with terror, the officer took me in his arms, and after that everything was a confused nightmare of unimaginable horrors, finally swallowed up in merciful blackness.

"When I awoke the next morning, I was lying half dressed on my own bed. The house was strangely silent. I staggered into the adjoining room. It was littered with the remains of the orgy of the night before—dirty dishes, overturned chairs. The tablecloth was pulled half off the table.

" 'Mother!' I cried.

"There was no answer, and groping my way to the kitchen I found my mother lying there dead, shot through the heart. The officers were gone. The village had been evacuated in the early morning while I was still lying in a stupor.

"I ran down our long avenue of birch trees and into the village street. A few dazed peasants were about, taking toll of the damage. The Uhlans had decamped, taking every horse and conveyance in the village, shooting on sight any one who resisted them.

"A kind neighbour took me in until after my mother's funeral, and then I went to live with my aunt in Riga. Whatever I was, I was no longer a German.

"I lived very quietly, going nowhere. In-

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stinctively I shrank from every man. After what I had been through I felt that I never wanted to talk to a man again. I tried to forget the horrors I had lived through, but in vain, there were always new horrors to spur my memory.

“One Russian defeat after another, the Germans overrunning our provinces; the March Revolution, the October Revolution; foreign war transformed to civil war—all sides and all parties turned brutes in those days. When the Revolution came I was heartily in sympathy with our Latvian Nationalist party, but after the armistice I felt that many of them were too ready to accept help from the Germans and I lost faith in them, or their leaders. Then I met Vassili.

He was a student at the University of Riga, and had thrown himself, heart and soul into the Revolutionary movement. Our friendship was purely platonic; passion had become a loathesome thing to me and I associated it unconsciously with love. Vassili was too wrapped up in his political activities to think of anything else. We read Karl Marx together, and he tried to convince me that wars all had their roots in the capitalist system. They could only be abolished by the class war which would do away with the system that made them possible. I was not

entirely converted, but I felt a certain sympathy with the Communist movement in Latvia because I felt that the Communists seemed to me to be the only party that had the interests of the Lettish proletariat at heart. I had become passionately nationalistic and I mistrusted the Baltic Barons and the middle class Letts with their superficial Russian or German culture.

"I secretly joined the Communist party, occasionally going to their meetings, but taking no share in party work. I was regarded by the Communists as a lukewarm party member and was rather under suspicion.

"Meanwhile I worked in one of the food kitchens that had been opened in Riga by the American Red Cross. It was hard work, but I loved it because I felt that it was constructive and entirely divorced from politics.

"There I met an American officer, who was different from any man I had ever seen. He never made me sex conscious, yet at the same time he treated me with a certain deference as a woman. He loved to joke with me about my efforts to speak English, and gave me lessons as I was buttering bread and ladling out soup. Occasionally he asked me to go to the theatre with him. At first I was timid about accepting these invitations, then I began to long for them, and soon I realised

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that I cared for him more than I had ever cared for any one in my life. He never suspected, and when he was transferred unexpectedly to Poland, he left me with a casual, 'Good-bye Marie, don't forget your English when I am not around to coach you.'

"During all this time I had not gone to any party meetings, but after he had gone I was reckless. Happiness was out of my reach, but I could have adventure, excitement, so for the first time I began to take an active interest in party work. One night I attended a meeting where plans were being made to celebrate the second anniversary of the October Revolution. The Communists wanted to decorate the graves of their Comrades who had fallen during the civil war in Latvia, but it was impossible for them to go to the cemetery, as many of them were known as party members, and would certainly be arrested. My connection with the party had never been suspected, so it was agreed that I should take the wreaths contributed by the party and place them on the graves. It was not probable that I would be watched in the cemetery, and if I was questioned at the gate, I was to say that it was the Name Day of my mother, and that I was going to decorate the graves in the family plot.

"I got there and back, as I thought, unobserved, but that evening I was arrested and taken to the Central Prison, where I was fed on bread and water, beaten until I was so weak I could not stand, and put through the third degree to force me to tell the names of fellow party members. I stayed in prison for five months, and while there I became a real Communist. I was filled with bitterness against the intolerable tyranny of our bourgeois government. Latvia, for which I would have died a few months before, became the synonym for cruelty and oppression. In the dictatorship of the proletariat and the world revolution lay the only hope for humanity.

"Consequently when peace was signed with Soviet Russia and Latvian Communists were given the choice of serving out their terms in prison and taking the chance of a possible political amnesty, or renouncing their citizenship and accepting deportation to Russia, I chose the latter.

"A little band of us, taking nothing with us but the clothes we stood in, left Riga under guard in a box car, cuffed and knocked about to the last by the soldiers who guarded the echelon. Then we were put across the frontier and left to shift for ourselves. I went with most of the others to Moscow,

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where I joined the Lettish Soviet, and volunteered for the dangerous work of taking propaganda literature and party documents across the frontier. That was a few weeks ago. As I was about to start on my first trip to the border I was arrested by agents of the Checka and accused of being a spy of the Entente. One of my fellow deportees who had always suspected me of being a half hearted party member had informed the Checka that I was very friendly with officers of the American Red Cross who were suspected of having helped in the Kronstadt Rebellion.

"So you see," she added wearily, "I am really without a country. There is nothing for me to live for any more. When I came here I was afraid to tell you I was a Communist. I wanted you to love me, I wanted to be, not a German or a Latvian or a Russian, but just a human being."

Maria Petrovna wiped her eyes and smiled at us through her tears. "I think," she said, "that Marie should be the president of the Fifth International."

In the days that followed we all grew to love Marie. She never complained over any hardships—her courage, patience and good humour were unfailing, but beyond grateful recognition of our affection she seemed to

have lost all interest in life. As she said, she had nothing to live for.

As time went on she developed a little hacking cough, and the daily temperature which is an infallible sign of tuberculosis. She grew thinner day by day, and when she left us it was only too evident that there would not be many more chapters in the story of her short tragic life. Perhaps she has found her country—who knows?

XII

Madame Mehemet Ali

MADAME MEHEMET ALI was lying at full length on the "divan," a plank bed covered with a tiger-skin rug; her lithe slim figure, straight as a boy's, relaxed, her slender white arms clasped above her head. Despite her name, there was no trace of the oriental about her. She was of the unusual type occasionally found among the South Russians, in whom there is often an admixture of Greek and Circassian blood. Her profile might have served as a model for one of the friezes on the Parthenon, and she had a figure like a young Diana. Her eyes were aquamarine blue, and her hair was the pale gold of birch leaves in autumn.

"The South wind is blowing in through the lattice of the Zenana," she said dreamily, "carrying the perfume of the horse chestnuts in the garden. It mingles with the scent of attar of roses. I am reclining on a pile of silken pillows, listening to the plash of a fountain in the courtyard. It is good to be

lazy after the bath. A girl brings in a tray with sweetmeats and coffee, and I lie back puffing a perfumed cigarette.

“‘Bring me the mirror, Zenaida,’ I say languidly. ‘I must make myself beautiful ere my lord comes, that I may find favor in his eyes.’ Kohl for the eyelashes, henna for the fingertips, a bit of rouge, just so, and I am ready to receive milord.”

Here she interrupted her rhapsody with a peal of laughter. “Oh, I wish you could see him,” she chuckled, “my Mehemet Ali. He is short and fat, with a face like a yellow pear, he shuffles when he walks, and he wears his fez on one side. Ai—ye, you should have seen his face when they took away his hundred pounds in gold. Poor old Ali, he was shaking like a leaf!”

It was not the first time that Madame Mehemet Ali, alias Anna Mikhailovna, late student at the University of Tiflis, had made fun of her Turkish husband. She seemed to regard the whole episode of her marriage as a huge joke, though it had landed her in the Moscow Checka instead of in Constantinople.

She had arrived a week before, her scanty belongings tied up in her tigerskin rug, thoroughly exhausted after a journey of ten days in a box car with an echelon of prisoners from Georgia, but she had not lost the gay

insouciance or the air of good breeding that made us all stare at her with unusual interest, and caused Maria Vladimirovna to put an almost deferential accent into the question she invariably asked of all newcomers—

“What is your family name, my dear?” If there had been a “Who’s Who” in Russia it would have been Maria Vladimirovna’s Bible.

“Mehemet Ali—ya Turetzka, I’m a Turk,” she answered gravely, but with a twinkle in her eye.

“Slava Bog—good gracious,” exclaimed Maria Vladimirovna faintly, and subsided.

Meanwhile Mme. Mehemet Ali was unpacking her clothes, and giving us a somewhat sketchy account of herself. While apparently exceedingly frank, she was rather reticent about the past and though we later learned her Christian name and patronymic, we never found out her family name.

Her father and mother, it seemed, had lived in Batoum before the Revolution. They were evidently people of means and position, for she had had a French governess and had travelled a great deal as a child. Shortly after the beginning of the war, she had gone to Tiflis to enter the University much against their wishes. While there she had met a number of English officers who

were sent as liaison men to help the Russians in their campaign against the Turks, and had picked up a little English. She had acquired "I say," "Good Morning," "Here's how," "Kiss me quick," "Bloomin' hot," "Ohdamn" and a number of other choice expressions, and her delight knew no bounds when she found I could one step and fox trot.

We often stood our plank beds against the walls and executed English dances for the delectation of the assembled company.

"That is the way I used to dance with the officers in Tiflis," she explained.

During the war she kept on with her studies at the University, and though life was dull after the treaty of Sèvres was signed and the British officers had left, it was still endurable.

Then came the Soviet Revolution in Georgia. There were few disturbances in Tiflis, but in Batoum there were mass arrests. Mail and telegraphic communications were cut off, and Anna Mikhailovna tried in vain to get in touch with her family or to secure a permit to go to Batoum. Naturally she got no more remittances from home, and in order to earn a living, she undertook to act as go-between for some of her friends who were secretly selling off their jewels and valuables to speculators, mostly Turks, who were nego-

tiating trade agreements openly, and plying various clandestine occupations under cover. It was a hazardous job, but a profitable one.

In the course of these transactions she met Mehemet Ali, who was passing as a merchant and signing contracts on an exchange basis with the new Georgian government. He seemed to have unlimited pull, and when he suggested that Anna Mikhailovna should accompany him to Batoum as secretary and interpreter, the necessary papers were obtained without any difficulty. It was just what she had been longing for, an opportunity to find out what had become of her family.

Once in Batoum, she discovered that her father had been arrested, but had escaped from prison and had gone no one knew where. Her mother had died a month before, of typhus. Nearly all her friends had fled or had been shot, and Anna Mikhailovna found herself absolutely alone in the world. If she could only get out of Georgia, go to England, become like an English girl and start life all over again! One day she told Mehemet Ali of her ambition.

"Very well," he said, "I can fix that for you. Marry me, and I will take you to Constantinople as my wife. From there you can go anywhere you choose," so Anna Mikhail-

ovna became Madame Mehemet Ali. As they were about to leave the country, Mehemet Ali was arrested as a British spy, and Anna Mikhailovna was detained as a witness against him.

"I'm sure I don't know why," she added with an air of perfect ingenuousness. "He is a fat old koupchik—a merchant, that's all."

But it wasn't all by any means. One night when everybody was asleep Anna Mikhailovna told me all she knew about Mehemet Ali. He did not know that she understood a little English, and several times when he had received mysterious visitors in their apartment at Batoum, she had caught stray bits of conversation. Mehemet Ali was sent by the British government to find out all he could about the relations between the Bolsheviks and the Kemalists in Anatolia.

"They suspect him," she concluded, "but I don't believe they have any real evidence against him. They may keep him for some time, but they will have to let him go unless he loses his nerve and gives himself away."

For several weeks Madame Mehemet Ali waited tranquilly for the time when she would be called on to give her testimony. Finally she was sent for, and she was gone for several hours. When she came back she carried her head high, her lips were set in a

firm line, and there was a bright spot of red on either cheek. I could see that she was fighting hard to keep back the tears and maintain a proper air of indifference.

"Poastyaki—these cross-examinations are all bosh," she remarked scornfully, but she vouchsafed no further explanation.

That night she crept over to my bed. I could feel her whole body trembling with some strong emotion as she curled up beside me on the narrow planks.

"Svolotch—the dirty Turkish swine," she whispered. "What do you think he did? He has told the judges how he bought furs and jewels from people in Tiflis. He gave me away to divert suspicion and make them think he was only speculating. For him, it means that he will probably be deported after a few weeks, but I was a Russian subject before I married him. They may let me go, but it is much more probable that I will be tried for speculation, and sentenced to a year or more at compulsory work. Chort—the devil!"

Then she clutched my hand.

"Suppose I told what I know about him? Which of us would go scot free then? He doesn't suspect it, but I hold his life in my hands."

I lay quite still for a few minutes review-

ing the possibilities of the situation. Anna Mikhailovna clung to me desperately. She was shaking from head to foot.

If she turned state's evidence, she would probably be freed and given a position in some government office in Moscow, where she could at least live decently and have a few comforts. If she kept her own counsel there was a chance that she would be eventually deported with Mehemet Ali as a Turkish subject provided they obtained no further evidence against him, but it was more likely, as she said, that she would be tried for speculation.

In my mind's eye I saw her, as I had seen hundreds of delicately nurtured women before her, shovelling snow in the streets, unloading freight cars at the railway stations, scrubbing floors and washing windows in government buildings. The man deserved no sympathy, but there was another side to the situation.

"Anna Mikhailovna," I said slowly, "your English officers used to play games when they were off duty, didn't they?"

"Yes," she answered eagerly, "'Bridge,' they called it, with cards; and tennis. I love tennis."

"Did you ever see one of them stop in the

middle, desert his partner, or cheat back if he caught another man cheating?"

"No," she answered promptly.

"Well, that's what we call in English 'playing the game.' "

For a long time Anna Mikhailovna was silent. Then she wished me good-night, kissed me and went back to her own bed.

After that night she never spoke again of herself or her problems. She was just the same as usual—gay, careless, indifferent, a trifle hard, and she sent us all into shrieks of laughter mimicking the Russian accent of her Mehemet Ali, or describing how she would rule his Harem, when she was mistress of the faraway Zenana on the Bosphorus.

She was with us for over six weeks, and when the guard came to take her away she kissed us all good-bye as if she were going on a pleasure trip. As she put her arms around me, she said softly—

"Don't worry, Margarita Bernardovna. I'm going to play the game."

XIII

Cauchemar

IT had been a particularly trying night, and consequently every one was in a bad humour that morning. Three prisoners had been brought in between two and five a.m. As there were already nine women and eight beds, this caused numerous complications. Maria Petrovna and Elena Ivanovna doubled up to accommodate one of them, a fellow party member; another slept on the floor, and the third cleared off the table, declaring that she couldn't sleep on the floor—she was afraid of mice.

Twice during the night she rolled off her perch, startling every one in the corridor with her piercing shrieks. The day's bread ration was so water-logged as to be absolutely uneatable, and there was a scramble, accompanied by many uncharitable remarks, to spread the soggy chunks on the radiator to dry. The plumbing was out of order, and the guards announced that no one would be taken to the washroom before dinner time—

consequently we were a frowzy, unkempt, irritable lot when Ekaterina Andreevna was brought in, looking like a fashion plate, even though it was a somewhat superannuated one. Perhaps that was what prejudiced us against her in the beginning. She certainly reminded us of our own shortcomings.

She was dressed in a black taffeta frock that rustled aggressively, over which she wore a black velvet coat, a little rubbed at the seams, but still supremely elegant. Her slender feet were encased in worn but smart patent leather shoes with grey suede uppers, her black picture hat was perched at a rakish angle over a perfectly undulated coiffure and she exuded a perfume of chypre.

"Radi Bog," she exclaimed, taking us all in with an appraising glance, "cauchemar—what a nightmare!"

We were perfectly well aware of the fact that we did not present a prepossessing appearance, but it was rather irritating to be alluded to as a nightmare.

"Quite so," returned Maria Petrovna, "when you came in I thought I must be having one."

Ekaterina Andreevna gave her a disdainful look, and sat down on the chair, gathering up her skirts, and shrinking into the

smallest possible compass, as if she feared contamination from her surroundings.

"Am I to stay in this filthy hole with such canaille?" she demanded haughtily. No one answered. The fact was self-evident. Then she proceeded to extract a lace-edged handkerchief from her pocketbook, and vigorously dabbed her eyes.

"Oh, I am the most miserable woman in the world," she moaned. "They will shoot me, I know they will."

"Shoot you—what for?" said Maria Petrovna bluntly. "I'll bet you never risked your precious skin for anything or anybody."

"Treason!" answered Ekaterina Andreevna, dramatically, "seditious papers found in my possession. It happened this way. I work in the Commissariat of Education. Our department is one of the few where it is possible for a woman of refinement to find congenial employment. The director was formerly a banker, and all the employés are members of the very best families in Moscow. It is one of the few places where one still hears French spoken. Russian is so crude! I always had a French governess, and my father would not permit Russian at the table.

"We only worked six hours a day, and M. Voroschin was so considerate! If I over-

slept myself, or missed a day at the office, he always realised how trying work was for one of my nervous temperament, and overlooked the matter.

“Our office was quite like a salon.

“One day the typist at the next desk to mine, a delightful person whose husband was one of the largest factory owners in Russia, showed me such a clever poem about our Jewish Commissars, and the way they go on in the Kremlin. It was too delightful, so I copied it and took it home to my husband. She told me the name of the author as a great secret. He was a baron, who used to give the most charming supper parties at Yard’s. Now he is a waiter in an illegal restaurant.

“A few days ago there was a raid in our apartment house, and the police carried off all the papers on my desk, among them the poem. This morning I was called on the telephone and asked to come to the Checka. I had forgotten all about the verses, and I came down rather expecting to be questioned about the people in the next apartment, dreadful Anarchists or something, who were always boiling cabbage or frying onions.

“The Commissar eyed me severely, and tapped a paper lying on his desk.

“ ‘How did this come into your possession, citizeness?’ he asked.

“ ‘I looked—it was the verses.

“ ‘I—I’m sure I don’t know,’ I stammered.

“ ‘We know the facts,’ he continued coldly. ‘You copied it at the Commissariat. Who wrote it?’

“ ‘I can’t remember,’ I answered.

“ ‘Very well then,’ he returned, ‘we’ll put you where you can refresh your memory. The charge is spreading treasonable propaganda.’

“ ‘So you see,’ she added despairingly, ‘there is no hope. I am doomed,’ and she rolled her eyes theatrically.

A howl of laughter greeted this remark. Perhaps it was a bit inconsiderate, but we had been face to face with so many real tragedies, that tragi-comedy was a relief to our overstrained nerves.

“ ‘Ekaterina Andreevna,’ I exclaimed, ‘is it possible that you can take such a thing seriously? They will probably keep you here until they find you don’t mean to tell who wrote the verses. Then you may be released, or sent for a few months to an internment camp. No one is shot for such a trivial offence.’”

Evidently this was not what Ekaterina Andreevna had expected. To pose as a mar-

tyr, to have a dramatic trial—there was something romantic about that, but to remain indefinitely in prison, that was a different matter.

Her face went white.

“Do you mean to say?” she asked, “that they may keep me in this horrible place for weeks?”

“Surely,” I answered. “Plenty of others are kept here for similar offences.”

“Ugh,” she shuddered, “but I have no baggage, no blanket, no toilet articles.”

“You have a warm coat,” remarked Maria Petrovna grimly. “I was arrested last summer in a cotton frock, and I would have worn the same clothes ever since if I had not gotten a blouse from the Commandant. You can get one if you ask for it.”

After that Ekaterina Andreevna subsided for a time. Her story had made no impression, and she had failed to rouse sympathy for her desperate plight. She was out of the limelight. She sat moodily in her chair, still wearing her coat and hat.

“You had better take off your things, Ekaterina Andreevna,” I said, but she ignored the remark.

When dinner was brought in she turned up her nose at the herring soup, but ate with considerable appetite the small portion of

white bread and cheese from our peredachas, the food packages received from friends or relatives outside, which were pooled and distributed share and share alike.

"I have such a delicate digestion," she explained, "do you think I might have another slice of white bread?"

"Sorry, Ekaterina Andreevna," answered the Starosta (room chairman), bluntly, "but you have just come, there are others who are no stronger than you are and who have been living on prison fare for months."

"I suppose I shall starve, then," she replied plaintively, "but it makes very little difference anyway. They will shoot me, I'm sure they will."

For the next few weeks we went through tortures with Ekaterina Andreevna. It was at least a week before she could be induced to undress or wash, and when eventually emphatic remonstrances on sanitary grounds from the other women forced her to do so, we found out why she was so averse to soap and water. When all her makeup was washed off she was an old woman. She was inconsolable until I presented her with a box of fingernail rouge and a little powder. She never combed her hair during the day time, and one night when the guard unexpectedly switched on the light, we discovered her

sitting up in bed, with her straggling grey hair falling over her shoulders, arranging the wig, the existence of which she had tried to conceal.

She openly despised most of the women in the room, nearly all of them Socialists, and persisted in talking French with me and Mme. Goncharova, a distinguished old lady, wife of a former governor general of Moscow. She was absolutely devoid of patriotism, and prayed fervently that the Poles would come and take Moscow. It would be a fitting punishment for the Russian people for having allowed themselves to be subjected by the Bolsheviki.

When she was in one of her more cheerful moods, which was rare, she regaled with accounts of the number of servants they kept before the Revolution, of the lavish way they lived in the old days, and of frequent trips to Paris and the Riviera. "I existed in Russia, but I lived in France," she said exultantly.

Each new arrival was treated to a long recital of the circumstances of her arrest, ending in a pathetic, "Don't you think they'll shoot me, chestni slov, honestly now?" She was always devising some petty scheme to attract attention, and if possible, sympathy. On several occasions she apparently had serious heart attacks, gasping for breath in

the most alarming manner, and demanding cold compresses every few minutes. I finally cured her by taking her pulse during one of them and telling the whole company that it was perfectly normal.

Her next move was to declare a hunger strike, which came to an ignominious conclusion when we caught her one night stealing from our food reserve. Then she worked herself into a condition bordering on hysteria, resolutely refusing to speak for several days, walking the floor most of the time, staring into vacancy and twisting her handkerchief.

All this while, we could see that her moral fibre was gradually weakening. She could pose as a martyr, it is possible that she could have even met death with courage and composure, but she could not stand the discomfort and monotony of prison life.

Finally one day she stopped in her endless pacing up and down the room, walked to the door, and rapped for the guard.

"Pencil and paper, please," she said. "I want to write a note to the sledovatl, the man who took my testimony."

She vouchsafed no explanation, and we asked for none, but that night she took her hat from its nail on the wall, borrowed a whiskbroom, and began to brush off the dust.

"I'll be leaving in a day or so," she said with a queer smile.

We stared at her blankly, thinking she had completely lost her mind.

"Yes," she said calmly, as if in answer to our unspoken question, "I sent my sledovatl the name of the man who wrote the verses."

After that Ekaterina Andreevna remained in our room for two days, but it was we who refused to answer when she spoke. She seemed perfectly unconcerned, however, slept soundly for the first time since her arrest, and spent most of the day telling her fortune over and over again with cards. She was quite confident that she would be released, but we were not so sure. The Checka sometimes has a grim sense of humour.

One afternoon the guard came in with a slip of paper and read out her name. She jumped up with alacrity, put on her coat and hat, and turned to Mme. Goncharova and me, ignoring the others as usual. "Au revoir, bonne chance," she said in her affected nasal French, and sailed out of the door.

The room we occupied faced on the court through which all prisoners discharged or transferred to other prisons had to pass. The window was whitewashed, but we had a peephole near the top through which it was possible to see what was going on in the

yard. Just opposite us were two doors, one on the right leading to the office of the Commandant, and thence to the street. It was there that prisoners were taken to receive their discharge papers. The other on the left led to the detention room for prisoners in transit to internment camps or other prisoners.

"I'm going to see what becomes of Ekaterina Andreevna," said Maria Petrovna, and climbing up on the window sill, she applied her eye to the peephole.

"Here she comes," she said in a few minutes. I jumped up and peeped too. Ekaterina Andreevna was passing through the yard with a jaunty air of confidence. Behind her walked a guard with a rifle over his shoulder. She turned towards the office of the Commandant. He touched her on the arm and said a few words.

Her whole figure crumpled, shrivelled until it seemed to fit her soul. She paused for a moment, then, with her pitiful pretence of youth and coquetry gone, she walked with uncertain wavering steps towards the left-hand door.

XIV

The Wages of Sin

SUPPER was over. The dezhyurnyi, the two women who were on duty that day, had dumped the remains of the soup in the Parashka, for fear the guards would complain that it had not been eaten and give smaller portions next time. They wiped off the table with a dirty rag, and two of the prisoners started playing checkers on the board marked on its grimy surface, with pawns made of hardened bread.

A new arrival, who had refused to eat her soup, flung herself on her pallet and began to cry softly. The others talked in low tones, all except Tanya, who paced the floor like a caged black panther. She was watching her enemy, the Finnish woman.

The latter was perched on her bed, opposite Tanya's, writing an entry in her diary, a small book made of pieces of brown wrapping paper, held together with string. In her effort to get in a comfortable position,

she put her feet against Tanya's bed, holding her book on her propped up knees.

Then the storm burst. With a wild whoop Tanya threw herself on Elvira. "Old parrot, Finnish swine," she yelled, "put your dirty feet on my bed, will you?"

Elvira's spine stiffened under her red flannel waist. "Bezobraznaya, impertinent black crow," she shouted, grabbing Tanya by her mass of black hair, and the fight was on.

Tanya was young and muscular, Elvira was old but wiry, and she twisted and squirmed in the grasp of the powerful brown hands that held her off at arms' length. Her fingers were firmly embedded in Tanya's curls, and the latter bent nearly double as she strove to avoid Elvira's kicks on her shins.

It was a quarrel of long standing, begun some weeks before, when Tanya insinuated in unmistakable terms that Elvira's unpleasant habit of shaking her skirt in the room was responsible for an unusually wide dissemination of "Tschei," known to the learned as "pediculosis." It had continued intermittently ever since.

Finally, as Elvira was evidently getting the worst of it, I decided that it was time to take action. "Oh Tanya, come over here," I said, "there's a huge bug on the wall over

my bed." Tanya gave Elvira a last shake; and a push that sent her sprawling on the floor, and then, all smiles, came over and joined me on my bed, where we inspected an enormous black cockroach perched just over my head.

"Gramadni radost," she announced solemnly. "It's a black one. That means good luck. Don't kill it, Margarita Bernardovna."

From that our conversation drifted to the old days in the Ukraine, when Tanya and her playmate Kolya used to catch crickets and keep them in little wooden boxes to hear them chirp. At twilight they brought out their pets and sat on the doorsill of the pink stuccoed izba, watching the sun go down between the branches of two giant birch trees across the way, beyond which acres and acres of sugar beets glowed bronze green in the slant rays. Then they would go down to the village to watch the dancing.

Old blind Mikhail strummed his zither until everybody was tired, and then he sang them the legend of Saint Nikolai of Kiev. Tanya had learned scores of folk songs and legends from her grandmother, and she never wearied of repeating them to me. One of her favourites was a song about a girl who loved a Cossack, but he refused to marry her because she had no dowry, and he went away.

But her image haunted him until it drove him back, and he found her married to the richest "koulak" in the village. She laughed at him, and in despair, he killed himself.

When Tanya was in her softer moods, she was a delightful companion, with all the charm of a fascinating, wayward child. She forgot to be insolent, quarrelsome and obscene. There were corners in Tanya's mind that were still clean and wholesome. But these moods were few and far between. Tanya was obsessed by fear—fear of the firing squad to which she had sent so many men without a quiver of compunction.

For three years she had made a living at the oldest and most infamous trade of her sex. She was a hanger-on of all armies, consorting indiscriminately with Reds and Whites, revolutionaries, counter-revolutionaries, bandits and her country's foreign enemies. During the Petlura campaign in the Ukraine she had served as a stool pigeon for the Checka, decoying revolutionaries into the Bolshevik net. Then she had mysteriously disappeared with a temporary lover, and had betrayed many Bolsheviks to the White Contrazvyetka.

Drifting back to Soviet Russia, after a quarrel with her White officer, with her tracks carefully covered, she had sold impor-

tant information to the Reds. They had sent her on a secret mission to Esthonia, where she had betrayed twenty Communists to the Esthonians, who later suspected her, with reason, of double crossing them, and had shipped her across the Russian border, with the result that she was arrested and brought to Moscow for a trial that would probably result in the infliction of the death penalty.

For all this Tanya felt no remorse. Her only regret was that she had bungled things in Esthonia. As for political opinions, she had none. She despised all parties alike, and had a profound contempt for all governments. Fundamentally, like many of the peasants, she was an Anarchist. Apparently, with the curious oriental fatalism inherent in most Russians, she had no fear of death itself, but she dreaded being shot. It was the primitive instinct of a trapped animal, coupled with resentment at being outwitted by the Bolsheviks.

"I'll cheat them yet, the dirty swine," she used to say fiercely.

The physical restraint of prison life was torture to her, and she was never still for a moment, day or night, except when, from sheer exhaustion, she fell into a heavy sleep. She was a born actress and mimic, and entertained us by the hour with her impersona-

tions of Communist agitators, drunken White officers, Jewish speculators, and various shady types. Sometimes she mounted our one rickety chair, and with a shawl draped around her lithe figure, she declaimed passages from well known plays, largely improvised, though she had a surprisingly retentive memory. Woe to the woman who tried to occupy herself with anything else, to play cards or sleep during these performances. Tanya would indulge in such a flood of filthy abuse that the guard would stick his head in the door, and threaten to send us all to the "podval," the cellar, for insubordination.

Then Tanya would jump down from her chair, all smiles and seductiveness, and coax him back into a good humour. Soon she began to have friends among the guards, and there was one in particular, a young Lett, the captain of the guard, who seemed to be completely under her spell.

Whenever he was on duty, Tanya always remained behind after our morning visits to the washroom, sometimes for half an hour. She was very reticent about these absences, vouchsafing her confidence to no one. In fact most of the women in the room loathed her, and were only passably civil to her to avoid trouble.

She took a violent fancy to me, however, and at night when the others were asleep, she often came and sat on my bed, retailing to me stories of her adventures, which fortunately I did not always understand owing to my limited knowledge of Russian profanity and half-world jargon. She had never been exacting as to the price for her services—a pair of new shoes, a bottle of champagne, a silk dress, or a handful of gold roubles as the case might be.

It was all rather revolting, and if it had not been for the occasional glimpses of the Tanya of other days which she revealed at rare intervals, she would have been impossible. Little by little I began to realise that Tanya was not so much sinning as sinned against. She was only one of the thousands of bits of human wreckage cast adrift by the war and the Revolution.

She and Kolya had always taken for granted that they would be married when they grew up, but when she was fifteen the war began, Kolya was conscripted and Tanya followed him to the front. One day he was listed among the missing. In a few months there was a baby. Tanya was ashamed to go back to the village, and went to live with her aunt in Kiev. She was pretty, times were hard, work was scarce, and her aunt frankly

told her she would have to earn her living as best she could.

For a while she tried to go straight, then the baby died, and Tanya began to drink "samagonka," the hootch made by the Russian peasants. When the Germans occupied Kiev, she took to living with a German officer. He soon tired of her and commenced to beat her. Tanya, out of bitter hatred for all Germans, secretly joined the Bolsheviki and sold them information—for money when she could get it, finally for anything from a shawl to a keg of herrings.

Then one day Kolya reappeared. He had been taken prisoner by the Austrians, and had escaped after many months' imprisonment in Galicia, beating his way back to Russia through the Austrian lines. The past, for Tanya, was wiped out. She asked nothing better than to be taken back and slave for him the rest of her life. But Kolya found out how she had been living in his absence, and proceeded to deal with her according to his ethics. He horsewhipped her with a doubinushka and left her. After that nothing mattered any more. All men were swine!

During the long weeks in prison, Tanya never betrayed to the other women the awful fear that possessed her body and soul. Except at rare moments, when it got the better

of her, and she flung herself across my bed, shaking with dry sobs, she was apparently confident in her ability to play at hide and seek with fate.

Meanwhile we could see that the captain of the guard had become her abject slave. He was madly, fatuously in love with her. One day she came back from the washroom nearly an hour after the rest of us. Her face was flushed, her eyes shining.

“Margarita Bernardovna,” she whispered, “it is all arranged. Shura is to be on guard day after to-morrow. He is going to smuggle in a cap and a big linen apron belonging to one of the scrubwomen, and a forged pass. When we go to the washroom, I am to stay behind, as I often do, to scrub the floor. He will send one guard on a message to the Commandant, the man at the door has been bribed; and I will put on the scrubwoman’s clothes, slip downstairs and get out on my pass. No one will notice that I am missing till the guard is changed in the evening. Shura will join me in a safe place he knows of as soon as he is off duty. He will get out of Moscow and hide with friends of his in the country until they have stopped searching for us. Then we will beat our way to the South, Shura will

join one of Makhno's bands, and we can snap our fingers at the Bolsheviks."

I noticed that Tanya seemed unnaturally excited that evening. She was even more boisterous and incoherent than usual. She and the Finnish woman had their accustomed pitched battle, and when she went to bed, she was muttering and talking to herself and complaining of a terrible headache which had bothered her for some days. For several hours she tossed restlessly on her pallet, then we were startled by a piercing shriek that brought the guards running to the door. One of them hastily switched on the light, and we saw Tanya, bolt upright in bed, her eyes almost starting from her head, brandishing an empty bottle.

"God," she screamed, "take them away. Stop pointing those guns at me, I won't die, I won't die, I tell you."

As the guards stepped into the room, she flung the bottle at one of them, hitting him full in the face, with a torrent of the most horrible profanity I have ever heard. Then, shrinking back on her pallet, she dashed her head with a sickening thud against the wall.

In spite of the impact, she did not lose consciousness, but sprang forward once more, and flung herself on both men, fighting, scratching and biting like a wild beast. It

was at least five minutes before she was overpowered, but she continued to shriek and struggle until one of the men succeeded in gagging her with a handkerchief.

The Commandant was hastily summoned, and after one look ordered her instantly removed. All this while the rest of us had sat huddled on our pallets, speechless with horror as the truth dawned on us. Tanya had suddenly gone insane.

Several days afterwards, the medical examiner made his rounds. He was a third year medical student—a very kindly, human person, and I ventured to ask him what had become of Tanya.

“Vchera umirla—she died yesterday,” he answered shortly. “An infection common enough among women of her class, that suddenly attacked the brain.”

Tanya had cheated the Bolsheviki, but she had been called to account before a higher court.

XV

A Lettre de Cachet

CHORT—the devil,” said Maria Eduardovna, stamping her pretty little foot in its French heeled patent leather boot, “this is the last time I’m going to oblige a friend. What’s the use of having a member of the Checka living in your apartment if you can’t get protection?”

Nobody was able to answer this question, for the other prisoners to whom she appealed were all politicals. A boarder from the Checka was the last person they would have sought. They looked at her curiously, and rather suspiciously as she unwound her bright coloured shawl from her curly brown head, and plumped herself down on her plank bed. But, to the experienced observer, there was nothing suspicious about Maria Eduardovna. She belonged to that large and flourishing class that has become part of the Soviet Bourgeoisie. Her smart blue serge frock was of the latest cut, her fur lined coat was evidently a new acquisition, and she had

the sleek, well fed appearance of a pampered Persian kitten. Exceedingly good to look at she was too, with her gold brown curls, hazel eyes, soft olive brown skin, pert little nose and generously modelled lips, red as two hibiscus blossoms. Except for the fact that her lithe figure was a bit too generously moulded and her cheek bones a trifle too prominent for Western ideas, Maria would have passed for a beauty in London, New York or Paris.

For the moment, however, she was transformed into a good imitation of an enraged kewpie doll. She had sailed into our room a minute before with all the hauteur of an offended duchess, given one withering look at the guard, and the instant he was out of hearing, she consigned him and all his forbears and progeny to a hotter place. Then, with a sudden change of mood, she burst out laughing and posed her enigmatic question.

"Poor technique on your part, I guess, Maria Eduardovna," I returned. "Let's hear the story, and I'll tell you where you slipped up."

"No such thing, there's something very fishy about the whole business. Everything was going beautifully until Emma got mixed up in it. You see it was this way. I had a three room apartment, and rented one of the

rooms to Z——, an officer from the Checka. The other was vacant until Emma Friedmann and her husband turned up, and I let them have it. Emma is pretty as a picture and she likes good things to eat and drink better than anybody I ever saw, so she went for Z——. It worked all right for a while. Z—— was made about Emma, and we lived like bourjeci—Emma only had to say what she wanted.

“Then came the peace treaty with Latvia. The Friedmanns are Letts, and as Lettish subjects they had a right to leave the country, so Emma suddenly began to be crazy about her husband. She intended to leave with him. Z—— stormed and raged, but Emma was adamant. They had their passports and intended to leave to-morrow.

“I’d just gone to bed this evening,” she continued, “with my hair all done up in curl papers, and a bad cold. Emma’s husband had gone out and she was in bed too, when the doorbell rang. I went to the door, and there were an officer and three soldiers from the Checka.

“ ‘Does Emma Friedmann live here?’ they asked. ‘We have a warrant for her arrest.’ Just then Emma appeared, looking very sleepy.

“‘It’s a mistake,’ she said coolly, ‘but I suppose I’ll have to go around and explain matters to Z——. Maria, there’s a good girl, put on your things and go with me to the Checka, I’m afraid to walk back alone.’ Like the Douraka—fool that I am, I felt sorry for Emma, so I grabbed my coat, and off we went. When we got here Emma asked to see Z——, and everybody just grinned. By this time I was getting nervous. ‘I suppose you’ll have to wait, Emma,’ I said, ‘but I’m going home.’

“‘Not so fast, citizeness,’ said one of the soldiers, ‘you are both under arrest,’ and I was taken off and dumped in here. That’s all I know about it.”

But it wasn’t all Maria knew by any means. The next day she confidently expected to be released, but no one came for her that day or the next. On the third morning a guard appeared. “Solina,” he demanded. “Here,” she answered, reaching for her coat and shawl. “Na fotograf—to the photographer,” remarked the guard maliciously, adding, “you won’t need a coat for some time, citizeness.” Poor little Maria began to realise that her position was more serious than she had thought possible, and that night she confided to me the secret that was weighing on her mind.

Her husband, who was an employé of the Supreme Economic Council, had been arrested sometime before for speculation in government stores. He had sold several thousand pounds of salt on his own account and cleaned up a tidy little sum before he was caught and tried and sentenced to five years in prison. She had been married only six months, and she was left all alone in Moscow, where she knew very few people, with a three room apartment on her hands. Through the chairman of the housing committee, who had profited in the past through her husband's transactions, she was able to choose her own tenants, and they had all lived together well, if not too wisely. Emma's husband, who didn't care a fig for his wife, was agreeably complaisant as long as the larder was well supplied. There had been many parties, in which much champagne and certain surreptitious kisses figured largely, ending with a particularly festive occasion on which Maria had met an official who had offered to get her husband transferred to an internment camp for fifty thousand roubles. Maria had gotten the money—just how Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy forbids me to state, and had paid it the day before her arrest to the obliging official. She was mortally afraid that something had gone

wrong with the transaction, but when Friday, the day for the delivery of food packages, came around, she received a package from her old nurse, in which was a little note.

"The Gospodin—the master, is in the Rojestvenski Camp. He is well and sends you his love." Then she knew that the deal had gone through as scheduled. There must be something else at the bottom of her arrest, but what?

For seven weeks Maria cudgelled her brains in vain for an explanation. She had apparently been forgotten absolutely and entirely. During this time she alternately wept and stormed, laughed and sang, and told stories of the gay parties in which Mr. Z—— figured prominently. Then one day she was called for cross-examination. She came back, after two hours, her cheeks flaming, her eyes dancing with a malicious light that boded no good for somebody.

"I'm a Lettish spy," she announced solemnly. "I have supplied illegal information to the Lettish Mission. It would be funny if it were not so serious, for the only time I ever saw the Lettish Mission was at one of Z——s' parties, which he asked me to have in my room as his was too small, and the only illicit thing I did was to let a member of the Mission kiss me."

After that Maria was more puzzled than ever. The espionage charge was a blind, but what was the game behind it? Time hung heavy on her hands, and she took to the popular amusement of looking through the keyhole. One day, gazing mournfully into the corridor, as was her habit for hours at a time, she suddenly jumped up and emitted a stifled whoop of joy, with her hands over her mouth.

"I've got it at last," she said in a stage whisper. "I saw his blouse, the one with the red and green cross stitch embroidery. "He went into a room down the hall—odinochka, solitary confinement. Emma is in there and he's keeping her until she promises not to leave Russia. If he comes again to-morrow I'll be sure of it."

The following day at the same hour Maria was at the keyhole. After about half an hour she emitted a low whistle. "Here he comes again," she said. For the next few days the red and green embroidered blouse disappeared into the room down the hall between three and four, and emerged an hour or so later. The mystery was solved.

They had been arrested because Z—— was determined to keep Emma in Russia. Not being able to persuade her, or to prevent her getting a passport as a Lettish subject, he

had had her arrested on a Soviet "lettre de cachet." She was in solitary confinement, and he was visiting her every day, promising to let her out when she changed her mind. In order that there might be no complications as far as she was concerned, he had preferred a baseless charge of espionage against Maria, and was holding Emma as a witness. It was as plain as day.

Maria's mind was quickly made up. She announced to the Commandant that she wished to obtain pencil and paper to write a "zayavlenie," a request to her examining judge, and as this was strictly according to the rules they were at once given to her. Then she proceeded to write two notes. One was to Menjinsky, head of the Collegium of the Checka, in which she told the whole story. The other was to her examining judge. It read—"I have written to Menjinsky. The Commandant has the note. If you and Z—— act quickly you can get it from him before it is delivered. In any case I have played your game long enough."

"Z—— has evidently bribed my sledovatel (examining judge) to hold me until Emma gives in," she explained, "but I have no intention of waiting till she comes to her senses. When he gets this letter he will either have to file an accusation against me,

which he has not done up to the present time, or intercept the letter to Menjinsky, tell Z—— that the game is up, and let me out—we'll see."

The letters were despatched, and Maria waited for results. She hadn't long to wait. Two days later a guard came and ordered Maria to pack her clothes. "I'll make him pay for this," she whispered to me exultantly as she kissed me good-bye. "Cocoa, tea, rice, raisins, dried peaches, herrings, cheese—Commissar's payck for me for six months. Otherwise Menjinsky will hear about it yet. You'll see what I send you on Friday."

The next Friday a package came for room twenty-three. In it were samples of all the ingredients of a Commissar's payck.

XVI

The Curtain

PURPLE twilight, the lingering twilight of the North, filters through the bars of the window in the little room in Novinski prison hospital where I have been for the last two months. It throws soft shadows on the prison yard, a large rectangular court with a small white church in the centre.

Most of it is planted with oats, for fodder is too precious to allow a bit of cultivable land to lie fallow, but there are broad flagged walks intersecting and surrounding it, and clumps of shrubbery, lilacs and orange blossoms.

From my window I can look out on them still vividly green though touched by the creeping indigo shadow that spreads from the tall building at the Western end behind which the sun sets. I cannot see it drop below the horizon but I do not complain. For eight months my horizon was bounded by four walls, and the first time I saw the expanse of blue sky above the prison court it

seemed as if the whole world belonged to me once more. I have never recovered from the beauty of the first sunset, the first glimpse of the crescent moon above the chimneys, the first corn cockle I found in the yard or the first time I heard a bird singing in the lilacs at dawn. It was a marvellous, a miraculous thing, after months of close confinement to have my field of vision extended to include all these wonders.

And to-day I had heard the summons that sooner or later comes to all prisoners, the curt command I had heard so many times addressed to others—"Sobriaites sveschi-ami,"—pack your clothes. I was to leave in the morning for what destination I could not tell, though the fact that my belongings had been searched would indicate that I was to be deported or set at liberty.

"Perhaps by this time to-morrow I will see the sun drop behind the horizon," I thought, but it was with no special feeling of elation. I could not tell at once the meaning of physical liberty. I had been physically a prisoner but in other ways had been free, with a freedom such as I had never known before.

All the petty conventions and limitations that had bound me in the past had been swept away—all prejudices of race and class, of caste and tradition. I had seen human na-

ture at its best and at its worst, for prison life has a way of stripping even the most skilful moral camouflage.

I had found what the dreamers, idealists, fanatics and opportunists in the Kremlin had been looking for in vain—the true International. For internationalism cannot be expressed in terms of a political dogma or a social creed. The way to its realisation lies in grasping the fact that not only the Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters the world over, but that the Colonel and Judy's husband are brothers-in-law as well.

The curtain was about to fall. I had heard the last of the unfinished stories of my comrades, and I was about to begin another chapter of my own. Whatever the morrow held in store for me it could hold nothing richer than the friendships and the memories I would take with me from my Russian prisons.

THE END

